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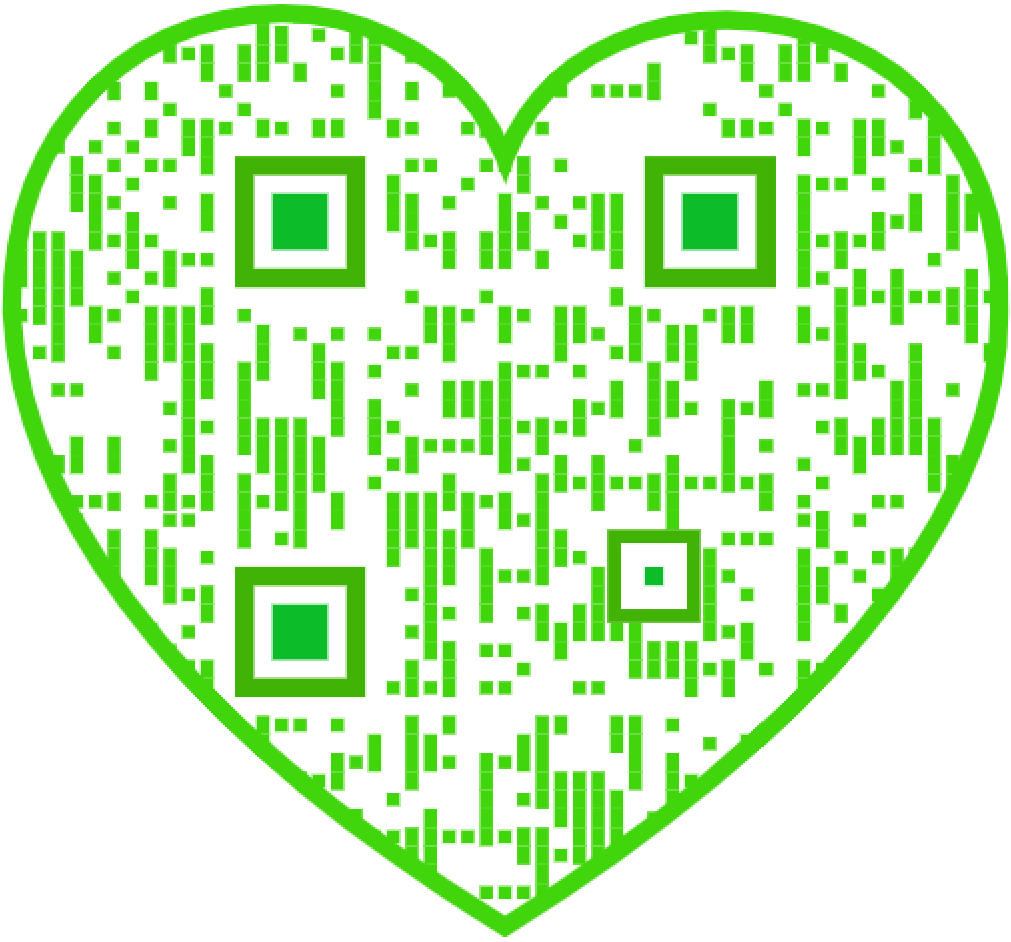

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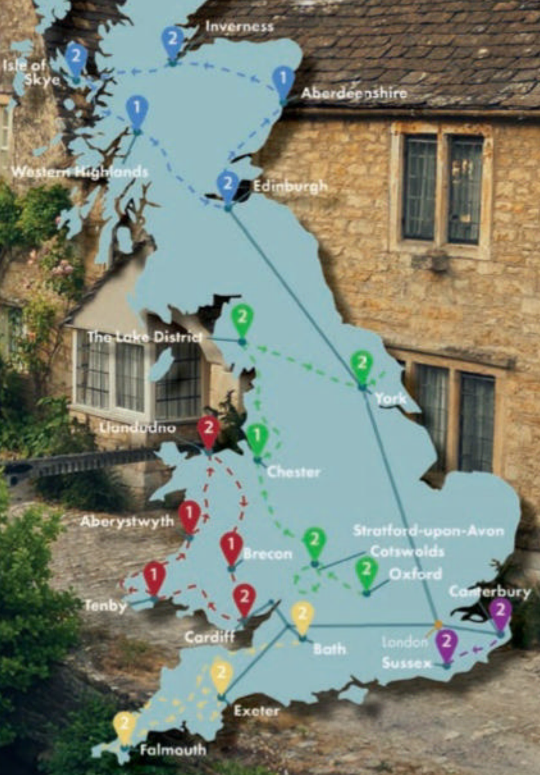
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EDITOR'S LETTER

If, like me, the arrival of spring has you dreaming of trips for the year ahead, you'll find this issue packed with inspiration. In Jane Austen's 250th anniversary year, we visit the places that the novelist knew and loved on a genteel tour of the south of England (*p14*) – afternoon tea included, naturally. Alternatively, if you're yearning for big skies and rugged mountains, you can hit the Highlands on the spectacular North Coast 500 road-trip route (*p64*).

Elsewhere this issue, we chat to national treasure Sir David Attenborough (*p33*), who reveals that for all his epic journeying, he is most at home in England's windswept beaches and local pubs. Speaking of the latter, have you ever wondered how British pubs get their curious names, from the Lamb & Flag to the Red Lion? Turn to *p61* to discover the intriguing history behind these unusual monikers.

All this, plus we learn about royal dress codes at Kensington Palace (*p24*); delve into the the origins of the outsize white horses carved into England's chalk hillsides (*p52*); and don tweeds for a bicycle ride with a difference (*p46*). Enjoy the issue!

Natasha

Natasha Foges, Editor

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His Britain, from the Dorset coast to London's West End

Cover image: Traditional English pub The Royal Oak is set on the waterfront in the village of Langstone, Hampshire © Gary B/Alamy

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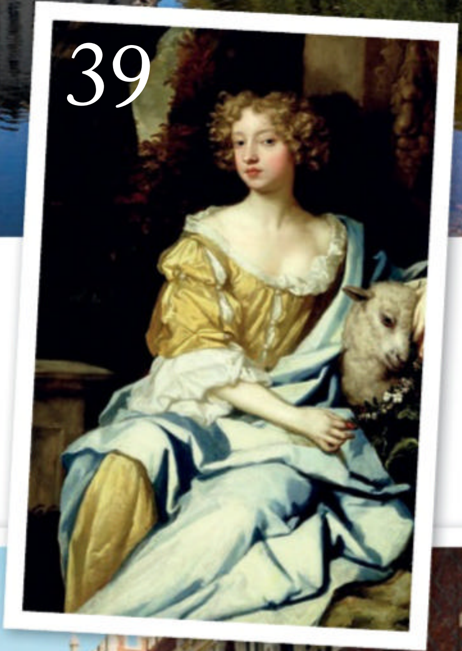
Dunrobin Castle



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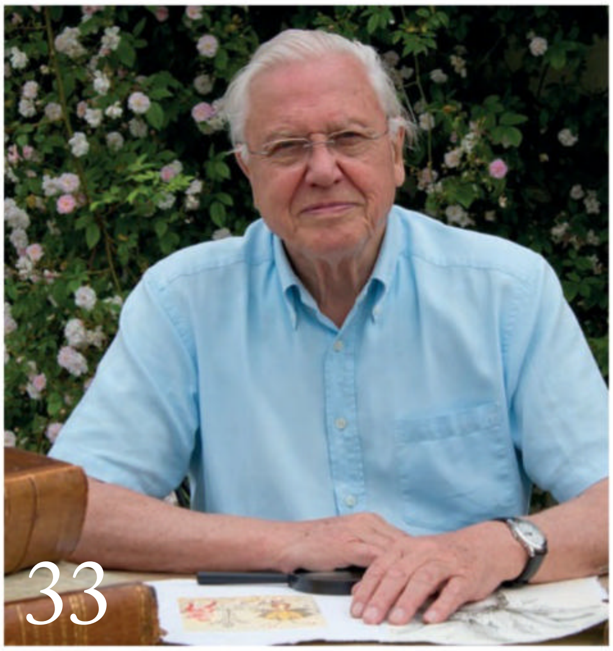

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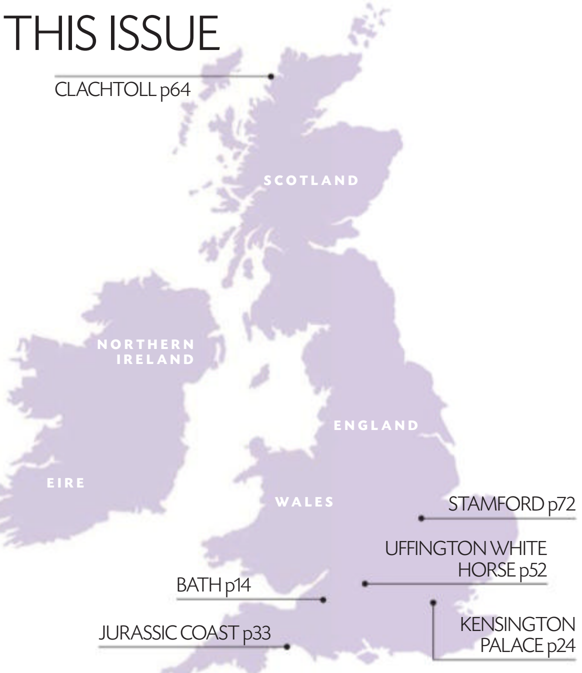

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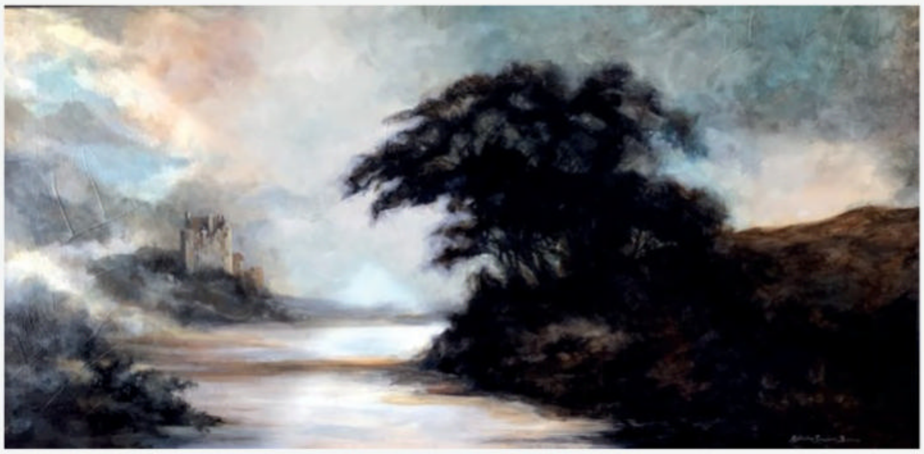
YOUR LETTERS

Write to us with your thoughts on the magazine and memories of Britain



STAR LETTER STUCK IN THE MAIL

In desperation, I have turned to my vast collection of past issues for solace. Across the pond, your colonial territory, Canada, is suffering through a postal strike, and I am deprived of *BRITAIN* magazine! I'm forever grateful for hoarding my 'bit of Britain', which inspired me to paint moody Eilean Donan in Scotland.

Who knows how many appealing pages will save me through Canada's bleak winter without communication from beautiful *BRITAIN*?
Katherine S. Brown, Toronto, Canada

Our star letter wins a copy of *1945: A Visual History*, a new book from the Imperial War Museums that recounts this momentous year through poignant images and personal testimonies taken from IWM's archive, published 10 April *(£35, shop.iwm.org.uk)*.

QUICK QUIZ

Put the kettle on – it's quiz time! The answers can all be found in this issue of *BRITAIN*. (Stuck? You'll also find the answers below)

① Actress Nell Gwyn was the mistress of which English king?

② Which of these cities is associated with the author Jane Austen?
- a) York
- b) Edinburgh
- c) Bath

③ Which heritage fabric, woven on the island of Harris, is experiencing a revival?

ANSWERS: 1. King Charles II **2.** c) Bath **3.** Tweed

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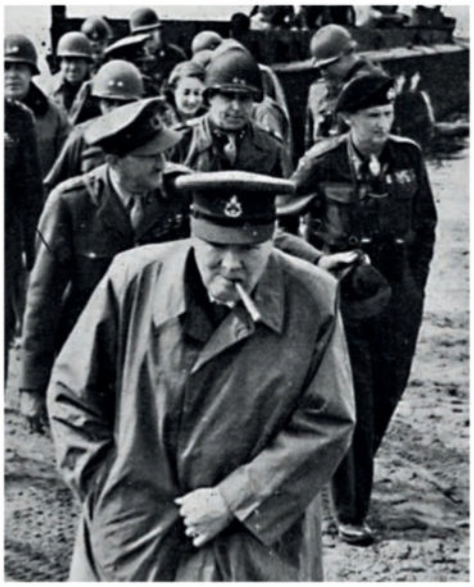
CAUGHT ON CAMERA

I am sure you have noticed this but if not, Patton and Montgomery are also in this picture [Vol 92 Issue 5], somewhat behind Churchill.
David A. Norcross, Alexandria, Virginia, USA



FAMILIAR HAUNTS

Each issue of *BRITAIN* magazine evokes memories and more travels which would be delightful – but now only possible through the pages of *BRITAIN*.

When I just received my January 2025 issue [Vol 92 Issue 6], I was fascinated to read of haunted locations. Coincidentally, I was surprised by the cover photograph. The store in the picture is called The Cabinet of Curiosities. I am an avid reader of mysteries by Preston & Child – one of which shares the title. One of the scariest thrillers I have experienced, the book about a fictional 'cabinet' leapt to mind in the context of your magazine. Once again, *BRITAIN* drew me into memories – real and imaginary. Thank you again for the stories and pictures of Britain – which mean so much to me.
Robert Dickson, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

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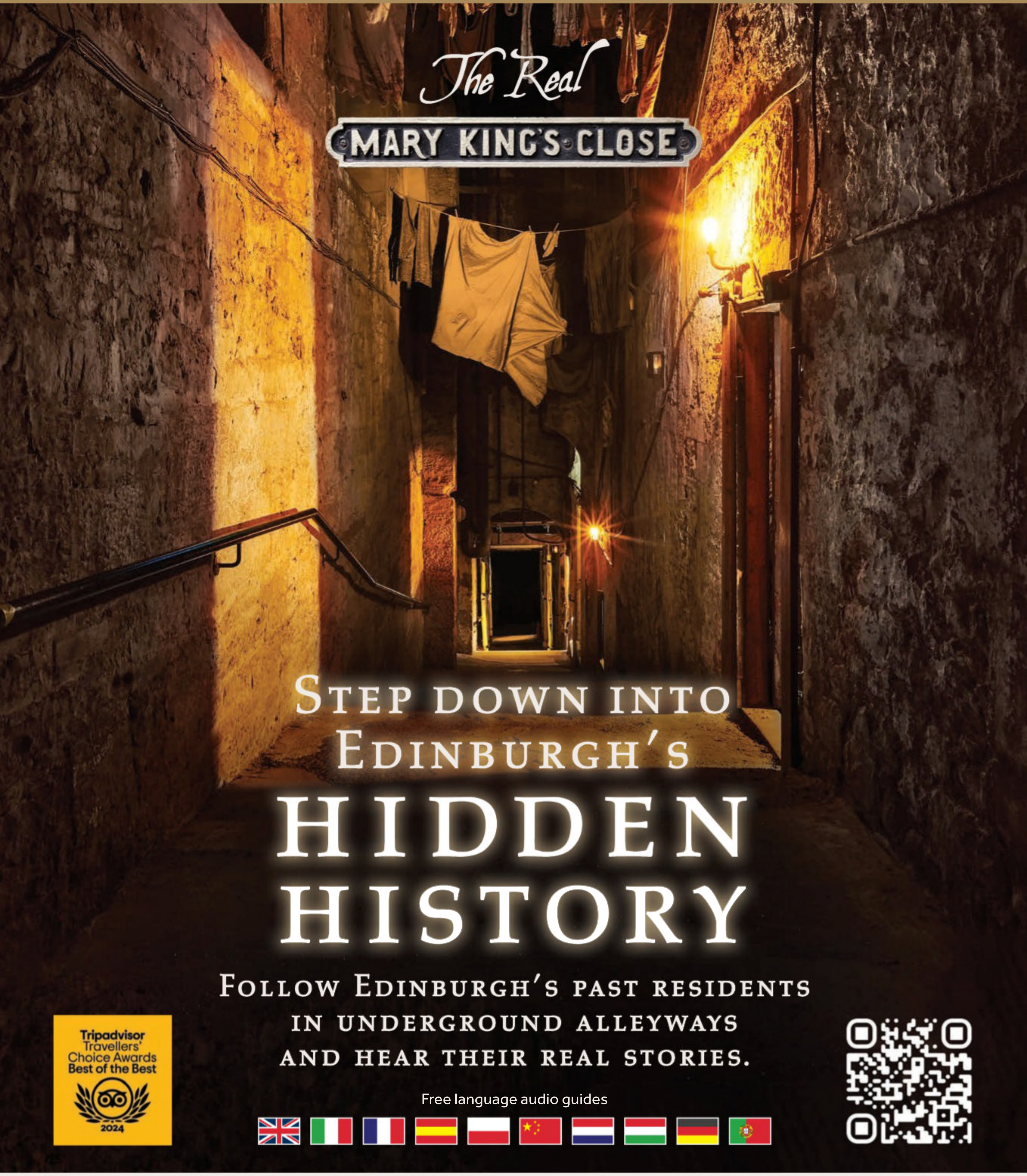

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THE BULLETIN

The Chelsea Pensioners, a landmark birthday, and a swashbuckling exhibition

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HERITAGE

A Chelsea welcome

The Royal Hospital Chelsea has a long and fascinating history, home to the retired army veterans known as the Chelsea Pensioners since 1692. The Royal Hospital is now entering a new era: for the first time, this historic building has been opened to the public, with guided tours and a brand-new museum in the Soane Stable Yard. The free, interactive museum has displays on the fascinating history of the Royal Hospital and the lives of Chelsea Pensioners through the centuries. The best part? Visitors have the opportunity to meet the Pensioners themselves, who conduct special tours of their historic home, clad in their distinctive red coats.

chelsea-pensioners.co.uk

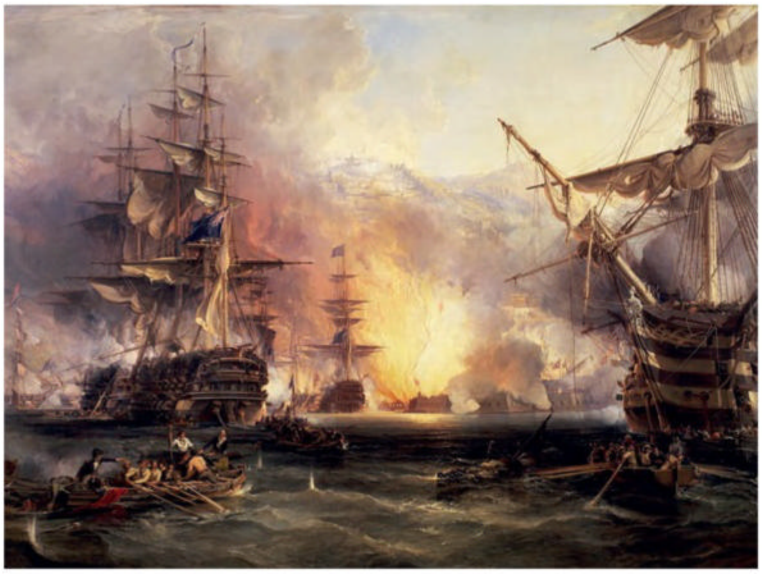
PLACES TO STAY

Heritage holidays

This year marks 60 years since the foundation of the Landmark Trust, a conservation charity that saves historic buildings which are in danger of being lost forever by sympathetically restoring them, and giving them a new life as self-catering holiday accommodation. The income generated from letting the 200 buildings in the organisation's care supports the properties' continued maintenance.

Each and every building is rich in heritage, whether they're Gothic follies, medieval longhouses or cotton-weavers' cottages. Some were even conceived by renowned period architects, such as St Edward's Presbytery in Ramsgate, which was built by Augustus Pugin, or have been a significant spot for literary greats, like Clavell Tower in Dorset (*left*), where Thomas Hardy is said to have courted his sweetheart.

landmarktrust.org.uk

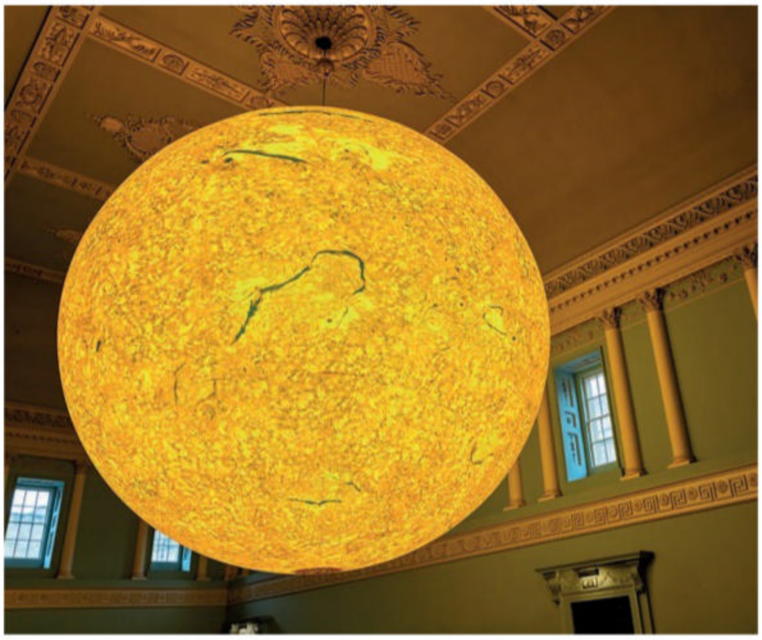


EXHIBITION

Walk the plank

Calico Jack, Captain Kidd and Blackbeard: heroic nautical rascals or violent criminals of the high seas? Landlubbers will be able to uncover the truth behind the seabound exploits of these epic figures at a major new exhibition, *Pirates*, which opens at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London on 29 March. Tracing the changing depictions of pirates through the ages, the showcase will reveal the brutal reality behind the thrilling fiction. The perception of these figures in popular culture – from comical characters such as Captain Pugwash and Captain Hook to anti-heroes Long John Silver and Captain Jack Sparrow – is also explored, to explain why we're still enamoured with the itinerant life of these swashbuckling seafarers.

rmg.co.uk



CULTURE

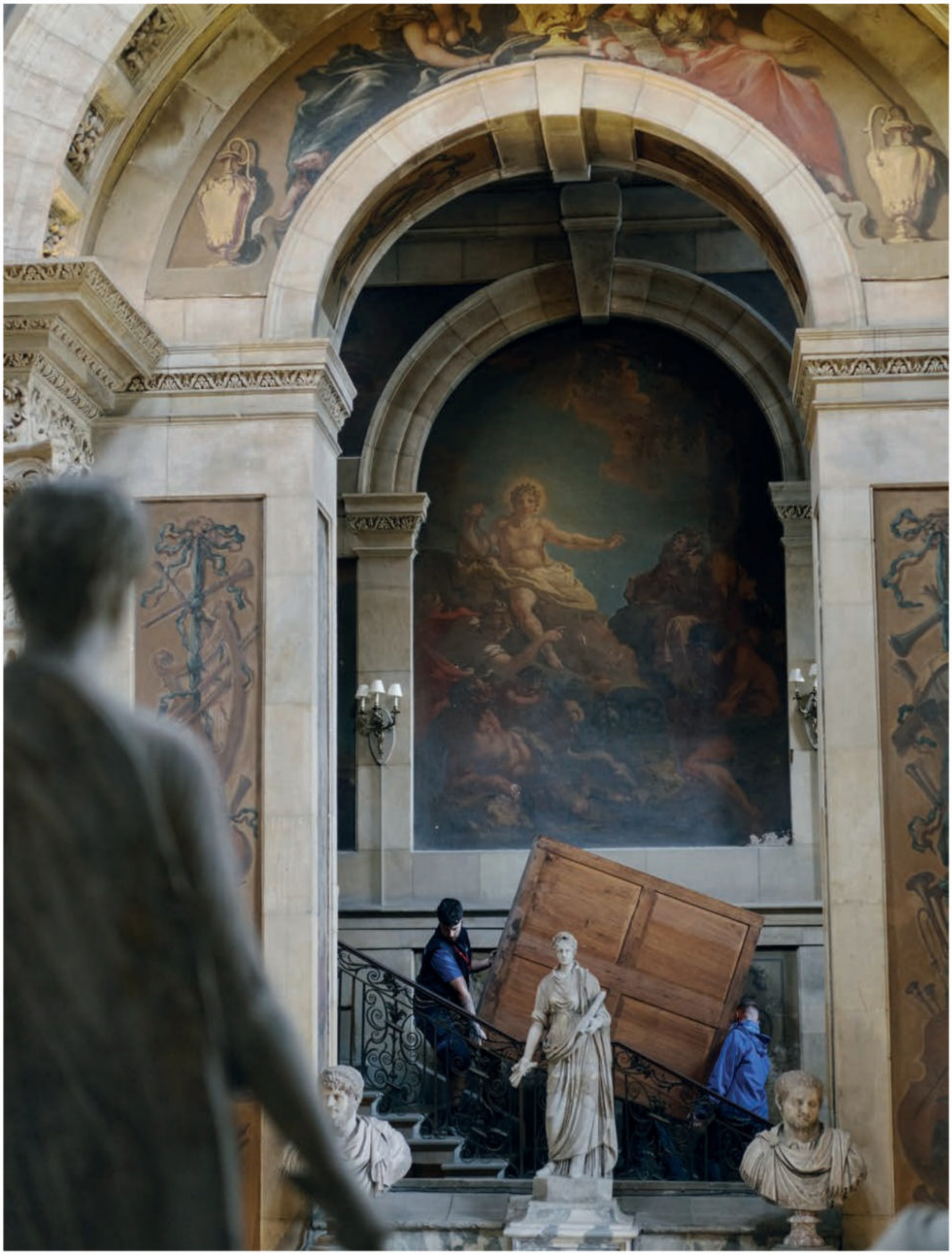
Follow the sun

Internationally renowned artist Luke Jerram is known for his large-scale installations, such as his *Museum of the Moon* (2016), a vast spherical moon which has been displayed in some of England's most historic cathedrals. Now the National Trust has co-commissioned the artist to create *Helios*, a gigantic sculpture named after the Ancient Greek god of the sun. Each centimetre of the internally lit sphere represents 2000km of the sun's surface, and with a seven-metre diameter, it combines audio of the sun captured by NASA with visual artistry, to dramatic effect.

Having started its journey in the breathtaking Georgian ballroom of the Bath Assembly Rooms (*left*), *Helios* will tour National Trust properties throughout the country, including Dyffryn Gardens in Wales (23-26 May & 29 May-1 June) and Basildon Park near Reading (15-18 & 22-25 August).

nationaltrust.org.uk

PHOTOS: © JOHN MILLER/*THE BOMBARDMENT OF ALGIERS, 1816* BY GEORGE CHAMBERS/ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH/JAMES DOBSON/NATIONAL TRUST/TOM ARBER



HERITAGE

Capturing the castle

Castle Howard is one of Britain's finest stately homes, set in a thousand acres of sweeping parkland filled with statues, temples, lakes and fountains. Following a major renovation of its historic interiors, *Castle Howard's 21st Century Renaissance* will open to the public on 25 April. This will include the unveiling of its Tapestry Drawing Room, which has been restored to its original 18th century splendour for the first time since a devastating fire in 1940. There will also be the opportunity to see the renovated Long Gallery and Grand Staircase, and a complete rehang and fresh curation of the country house's collection of paintings, sculptures and tapestries. There's no better time to visit this beautiful residence and discover its treasures. *castlehoward.co.uk*

Eat this with roasted or fresh fruits, depending on the season

RECIPE

Burnt honey baked custard

Emily Cuddeford and Rachel Morgan, the chefs behind the much-loved Edinburgh bakery, Twelve Triangles, have just released their debut cookbook. *Kitchen Table: Simple Things Made Well* (£25, *harpercollins.co.uk*) contains 75 recipes, all accessible for the home cook. This delicious comfort-food dessert is very similar to a crème brûlée custard – you can either serve it warm not long from the oven, or chill it in the fridge, which improves the texture so that it becomes silky and smooth.

SERVES 4-6

INGREDIENTS

125g honey

270g double cream

230g milk

25g caster sugar

7 egg yolks (approx. 100g)

2–4g sea salt

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 140°C fan.

Start by making the burnt honey. To do this, start off by melting the honey then boiling it until it reaches 170°C – it will be turning a dark amber by this point. Turn off the heat and add two tablespoons of water – be careful and stand back while you do this, as the honey will boil and spit. Use recently boiled water for less drama. This stops the honey from setting solid. Leave to cool either in the pan or in a heatproof dish.

Heat the cream, milk and all the sugar in a pan until steaming. In a bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the cooled honey. Once the milk is steaming, pour it over the eggs and whisk to combine. You don't want to whisk too much, as it makes a foam on top. Add 4g of sea salt, to help balance the sweetness, but add just 2g first, then taste and see how much you want: you can always add more but you can't take it away.

Pour it into a 30cm pie dish or similar. You can skim off any bubbles or foam, more for appearance than for technical reasons of flavour or texture. This needs to be baked in a bain-marie, which is essentially placing the custard in a larger tin or dish and filling it up halfway with boiling water. It stops the custard cooking too quickly and scrambling the eggs.

Bake for 25–27 minutes – it will still have a jiggle in the middle but it will set as it cools.

BOOKS

SECRETS FROM THE
AGATHA CHRISTIE
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JARED CADE

Secrets from the Agatha Christie Archives by Jared Cade (Pen & Sword Books, £25). Uncover a treasure trove of exciting facts about the crime-fiction legend. The author delves into how Christie conquered the serial market with her thrilling tales of murder and intrigue, providing new insights into her craft.

WILD
fishing

Wild Fishing by Kevin Adams & Jill Adams (Wild Things, £18.99). Publishing in April, this appealing tome advises how to get away from the more commercial fishing experiences and explore Britain's wilder, more scenic reaches, featuring 700 spectacular (and affordable) angling destinations.

WONDERLANDS

Wonderlands: British Garden Designers at Home by Clare Coulson (Quadrille, £40). This lavish new book provides an exclusive tour of the private gardens of Britain's most influential garden designers, from Dan Pearson's biodiverse garden in Somerset to Arabella Lennox-Boyd's awe-inspiring Lancashire garden.

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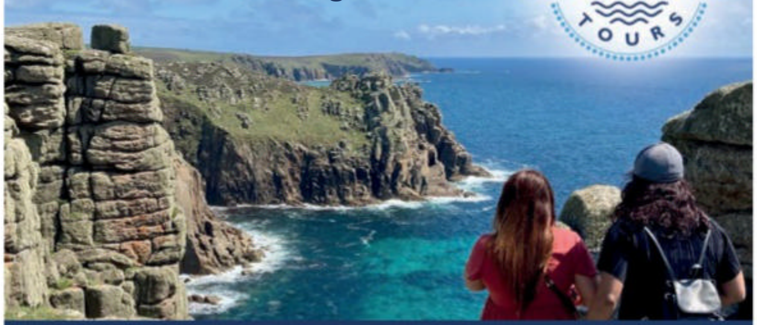

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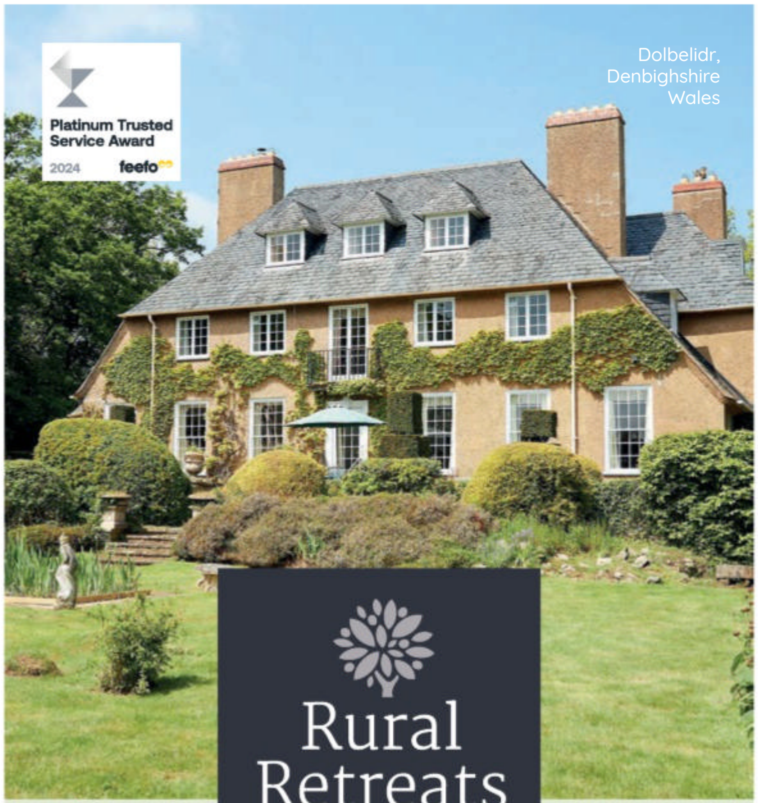
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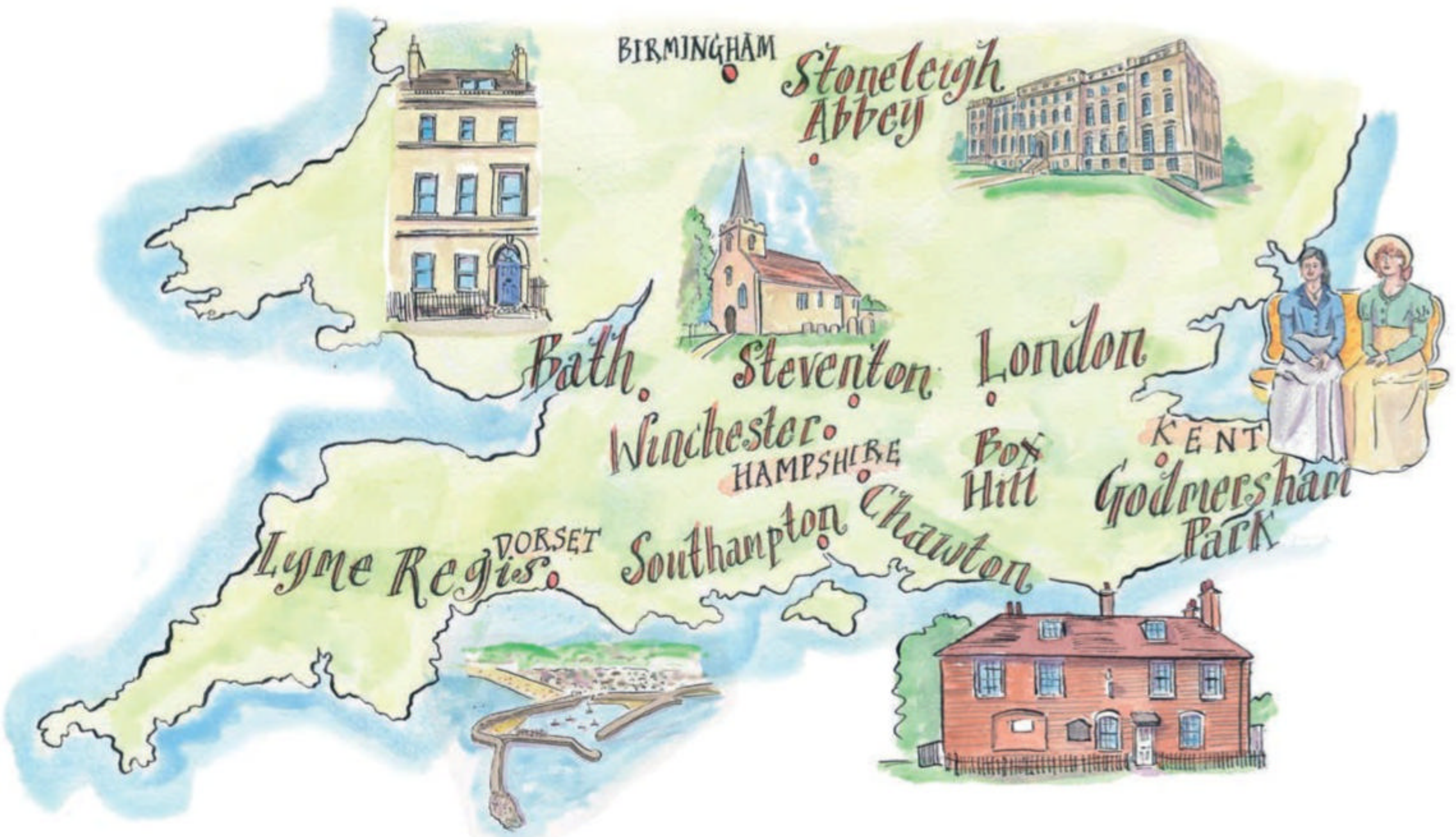
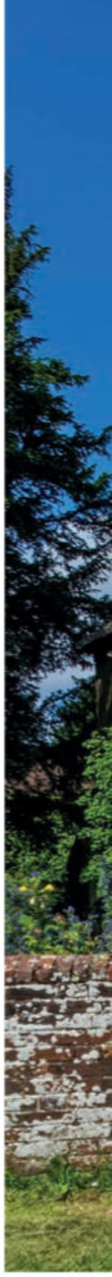
PHOTO: © CHARLOTTE HARRIS/VISIT BATH

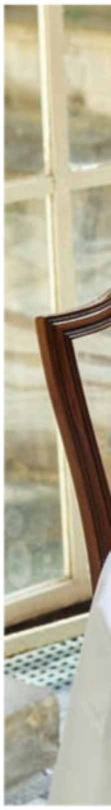
To celebrate the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth, take a tour of the south of England, visiting the locations that the author knew and loved

WORDS **FELICITY DAY**

In Jane's footsteps







Ever since it was saved from wrack and ruin by a heroic philanthropist in the 1940s, the pretty red-brick cottage in Chawton where Jane Austen spent the last eight years of her life has been a place of pilgrimage for her devoted readers. For within its modest walls she wrote or revised all six of her published novels, working on the tiny, 12-sided walnut table in the dining room, reading the finished products aloud to family and neighbours in the drawing room, and revelling in being a 'Hampshire-born Austen' come home to the countryside after years hopping between city lodgings.

The spirit of the author resounds as you tread its creaking floorboards, taking in the string of her treasured possessions and surviving letters now in the hands of the house museum, making it the ideal starting point for anyone embarking on an Austen tour to celebrate the 250th anniversary of her birth.

In fact, there is really no better place to find Jane than her beloved home county. Many who wend their way to the leafy lanes of Chawton take the opportunity to tread the path to the Elizabethan 'great house' at the other end of the village, where she went to 'dawdle away an hour or two' with her brother Edward, who, thanks to his adoption by wealthy, childless relatives, owned the entire Chawton estate. Plenty, too, make the hop of just 16 miles to Steventon, her birthplace. The rectory that was her first home is long gone, demolished in the 1820s by a nephew who inherited the parish and fancied something smarter; a lone lime tree marks the site. But the village's medieval church, where her father, the Reverend George Austen, preached, looks much as it did when the author regulary passed through the oak door for his Sunday services.

Then there is Southampton, where the cash-strapped Austen ladies lived in the shadow of the castle for a time after his death; and Winchester, the county town, where Jane came to seek medical treatment in 1817. The house on College Street where she died weeks later is a humble survivor of the last two centuries, just a short walk from the Cathedral, where she is buried.

But while Hampshire may be 'Austen country', it is far from the only place in England to claim an acquaintance with the author, and if you are prepared to call for the carriage to take you further afield, there are a host of other places to follow in her footsteps.

Top of the list is Bath. Family legend may say that Jane was less than happy to move to the spa city upon ▶

Opposite, clockwise from top: **Set on her brother's estate, this Hampshire cottage is where Jane wrote her six novels; the Winchester house where the author died; take afternoon tea at the Pump Room in Bath, where Jane was once a patron**

ILLUSTRATION: © MICHAEL A HILL PHOTOS: © TRAVEL PIX COLLECTION/AWL IMAGES; SEARCYS; WINCHESTER COLLEGE

JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE
Entrance through Courtyard

CHAMPAGNE

BELL CLIFF RESTAURANT & TEA ROOMS
FAMOUS GOURMET FUDGE

PHOTOS: © MICHAEL BROOKS/ALAMY; DAVE DODGE; VISIT SOUTHAMPTON

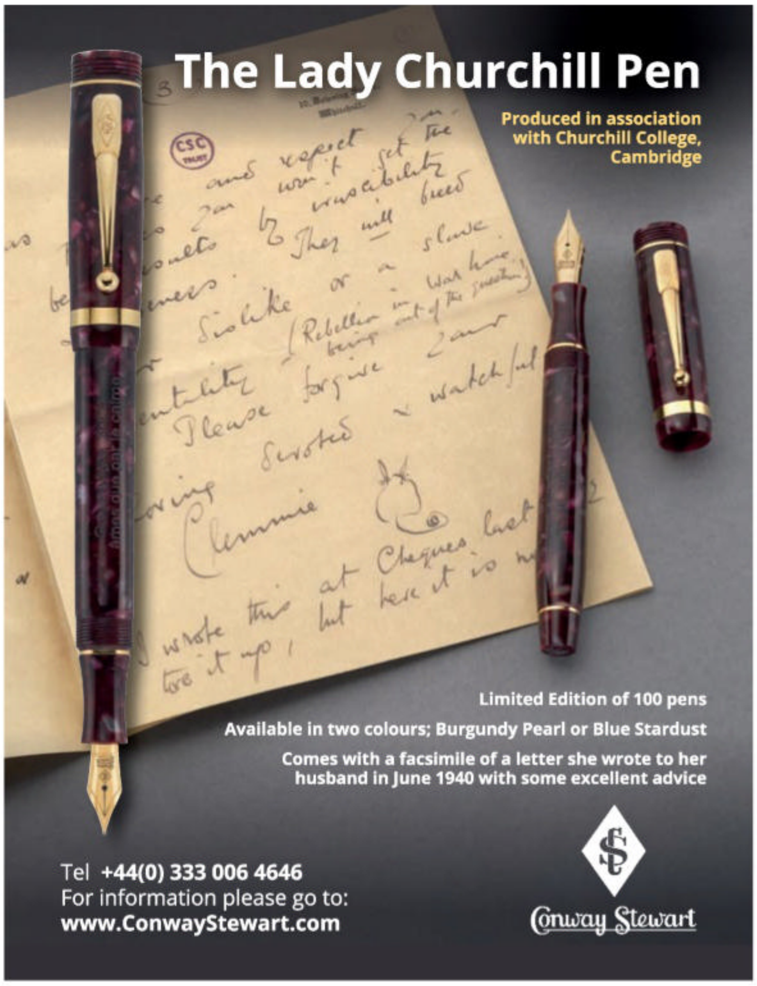
Top to bottom: Jane was so enchanted by the picturesque charm of Dorset seaside town Lyme Regis that it became a crucial setting in *Persuasion;* medieval gatehouse the Bargate bears a plaque honouring Jane's first childhood visit to Southampton

> The promise of yearly jaunts to the seaside softened the blow of the relocation to Bath

Mr Austen's retirement in 1801, but as the best-preserved Georgian city in Britain, with a starring role in both *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, there is lots to delight her fans. On a tour of the Assembly Rooms on Bennett Street (faithfully reconstructed after suffering bomb damage in the Second World War) you can take a turn around the ballroom where Jane and her characters danced.

Take tea in the Pump Room, where they promenaded up and down of a morning, and trace the author's steps through the lush, green surroundings of Sydney Gardens, where she enjoyed long walks, the challenge of its labyrinth, and firework displays. And you can even stay at No. 4 Sydney Place, the elegant, three-storey townhouse across the road that was the Austens' home until 1804, offering them a lovely, level walk into the centre of a city famed for its hills. After that, their residences got successively less desirable; Trim Street was the location of their very last Bath rental, taken after the death of Mr Austen forced his widow to economise, and is still easily imaginable as the noisy commercial area it was then.

The promise of yearly jaunts to the seaside had ▶



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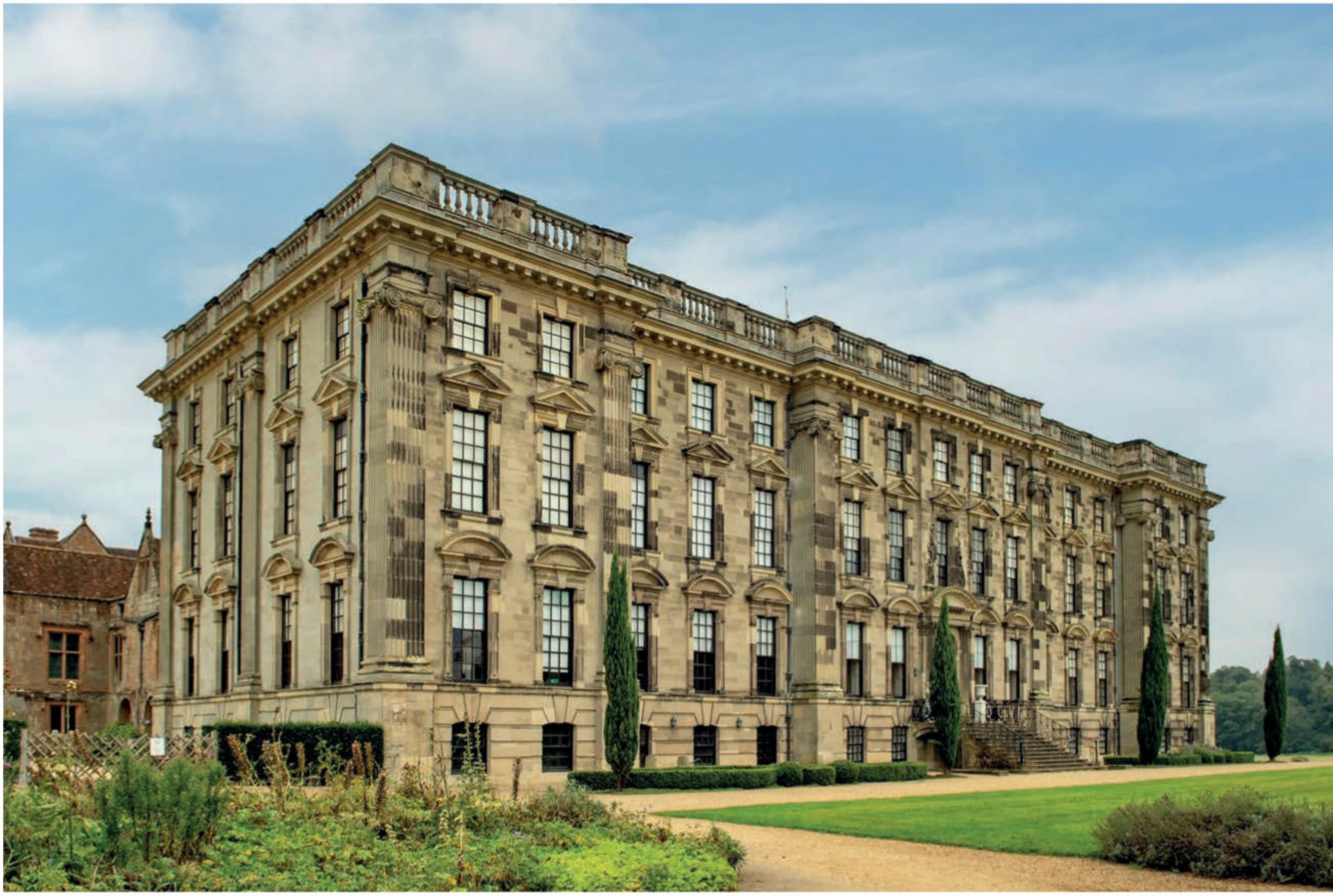
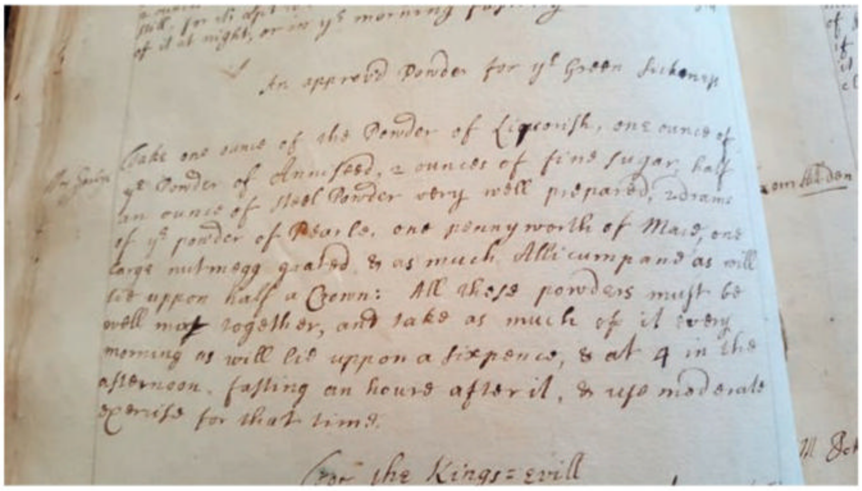


On a visit to Stoneleigh Abbey, Mrs Austen counted 45 windows in the imposing facade

Top to bottom: **Mrs Austen's cousin inherited the grand Warwickshire manor Stoneleigh Abbey; pages from a book in the Austen family home**



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For the Kings=evill

PHOTOS: © ROBERT HARDING/ALAMY

softened the blow of the relocation to Bath, and consequently a series of southern England's coastal resorts can also claim an Austen connection – from Sidmouth and Dawlish to Ramsgate and Worthing.

But it is the Jurassic coast resort of Lyme Regis, where she stayed in 1803 and 1804, that was Jane's favourite. It is well worth a visit to walk down the wave-lashed stone breakwater known as the Cobb, which she chose as the setting for one of the critical scenes in *Persuasion* – a novel in which she famously extols the virtues of the Dorset town and its environs, from the bay bustling with "bathing machines and company" to the "very beautiful line of cliffs" that stretch out to the east. Pyne House is thought to have been where the Austens lodged.

Jane is also known to have made regular stays with her brother Henry in London and extended visits to Kent, where the luckiest Austen sibling, Edward, had his family home. With two country estates and around £10,000 a year at his disposal, he was more than a match for *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr Darcy, and Godmersham Park, nestled in the Stour Valley, eight miles outside Canterbury, offered a slice of "elegance & ease & luxury" to his sister. Follow Jane there to wander ▸

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Above: Now National Trust-maintained, Surrey's splendid Box Hill is the site of Emma Woodhouse's unsuccessful picnic

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> The beauty spot of Box Hill in Surrey still prompts a "burst of admiration" from those who encounter it for the first time

through the parkland (and on certain days, the gardens) as she liked to do, and get a glimpse of the handsome manor house that some say was the true inspiration for Darcy's Derbyshire seat, Pemberley – now, rather unromantically, a training college for opticians!

To find another stately pile that sparked the author's imagination head to Warwickshire, where Mrs Austen took her daughters Jane and Cassandra in the summer of 1806. Her cousin, the Reverend Thomas Leigh, was about to inherit the vast Stoneleigh Abbey, with its sweeping views over the river Avon, its imposing facade (Mrs Austen counted 45 windows), and its impressive history (it had once sheltered a beleaguered Charles I).

As Janeites who take the tour today discover, it also bears a remarkable resemblance to Sotherton, the fictional home of the foolish but stupendously rich Mr Rushworth in *Mansfield Park* – most especially its chapel, which Austen replicated in print, right down to the crimson velvet cushions in the family gallery.

We can be less sure about whether the historic village of Great Bookham in Surrey, where Jane stayed with her godfather, the vicar of the parish, was a model for Highbury, home of the eponymous Emma. But it is certainly near enough the same distance from Box Hill, a beauty spot still prompting a "burst of admiration" from those who encounter it for the first time, 200 years after the heroine and her companions went there on their disastrous day trip. Very likely, it will be doing so for a couple of centuries more yet – just like Jane Austen's novels.

JANE AUSTEN 250

An array of events is planned to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth...

Visit the new exhibition, *Jane Austen and the Art of Writing*, at Jane Austen's House in Chawton, Hampshire, which includes objects that are believed to have inspired her writings. *janeaustens.house*

Book a tour of Jane's last home. No. 8 College Street, Winchester, is where Jane Austen spent the final weeks of her life, and where she died on 18 July 1817. The house is opening to the public for the first time in summer 2025. *winchestercollege.org*

Plan a walk through Jane's Hampshire. Long and short walks are available, including the popular Jane Austen Circular Walk, which begins at Jane Austen's House in Chawton and retraces the route she would have taken across fields and through the village of Farringdon. *visit-hampshire.co.uk*

Enjoy a day at the fair. Steventon village will hold special events throughout the year, including a country fair on the site of Jane Austen's birthplace on 6 July and a thanksgiving service on Jane's birthday, 16 December, at St Nicholas Church. *steventonhants.org.uk*

Stroll the new Jane Austen Heritage Walking Trail, commemorating her time in Southampton, featuring eight locations relevant to the author's life, each marked by a plaque. *visitsouthampton.co.uk*

Don your bonnet for the Jane Austen Festival. Taking place annually in Bath, the 2025 edition is set to be bigger and better than ever before (12-21 September). Highlights will include a large-scale, outdoor *Sense and Sensibility*-themed event and a Regency ball. *janeausten.co.uk*

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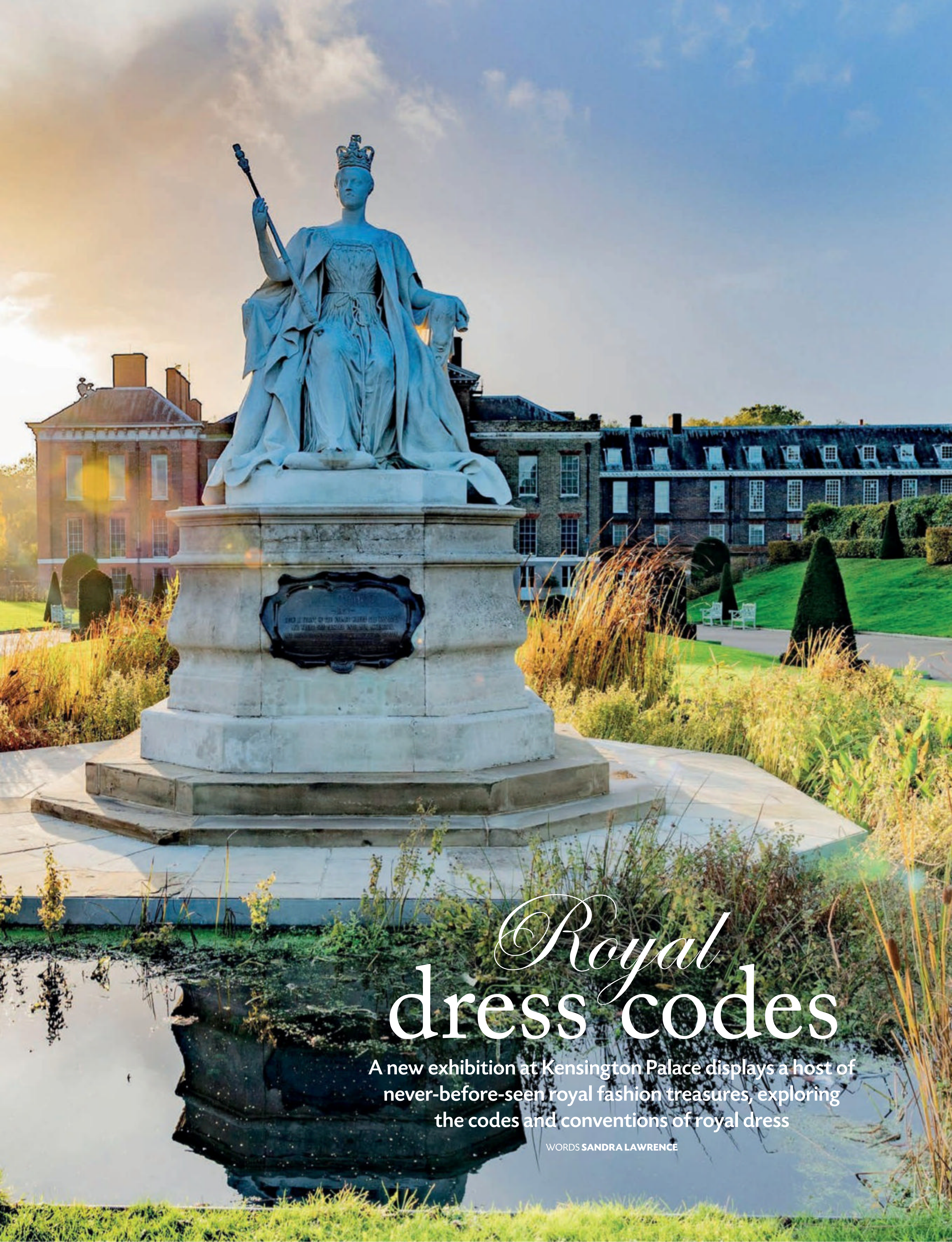


Royal dress codes

A new exhibition at Kensington Palace displays a host of never-before-seen royal fashion treasures, exploring the codes and conventions of royal dress

WORDS **SANDRA LAWRENCE**

Back in 1908, the Lord Chamberlain published a must-have sartorial guide for anyone hoping to get anywhere near His Majesty King Edward VII. *Dress Worn at Court* listed, to the last ribbon, button and epaulette, the exact costuming requirements for the budding courtier, whether a page, constable, diplomat or debutante.

"Everyone had to dress according to regulations," says Matthew Storey, curator of *Dress Codes*, a new exhibition at Kensington Palace. "But", he adds, "we all dress according to rules set by the society we live in". Using conventions set by royalty as an example, the exhibition throws a mirror to ourselves, asking why we dress the way we do. As Curator of the 10,000-object Royal Ceremonial Dress collection, Matthew is also keen to find new stories within the clothes he cares for. "It's about finding the stars in our stores," he says, "I wanted to find things we hadn't shown for many years; even some items we have never shown before."

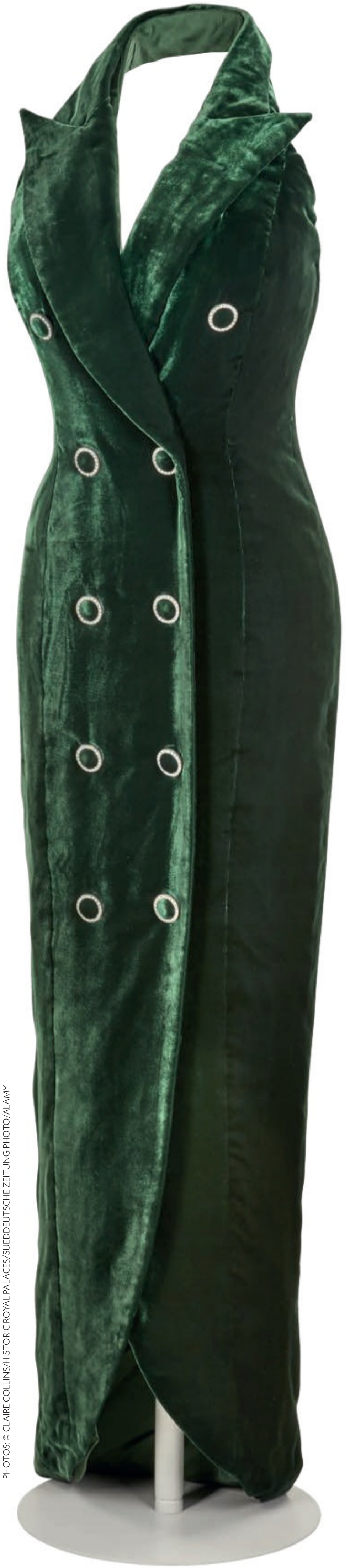
One extraordinary example is a recently acquired gown made by couturier Reville for Annie, Lady Holcroft's presentation at Buckingham Palace in May 1928. "Women might not have been wearing six-foot-wide mantuas any more, but they were still dressing in a particular way," Matthew notes. "At first sight, it looks like a stunning 1920s evening dress but then you realise it's got a train that's fixed at the shoulders, it is a certain length and has a Prince of Wales plume of three feathers for the hair." However fashionable it may look, Lady Holcroft's 'flapper dress' is compliant with the code, even down to the accompanying white ostrich feather fan.

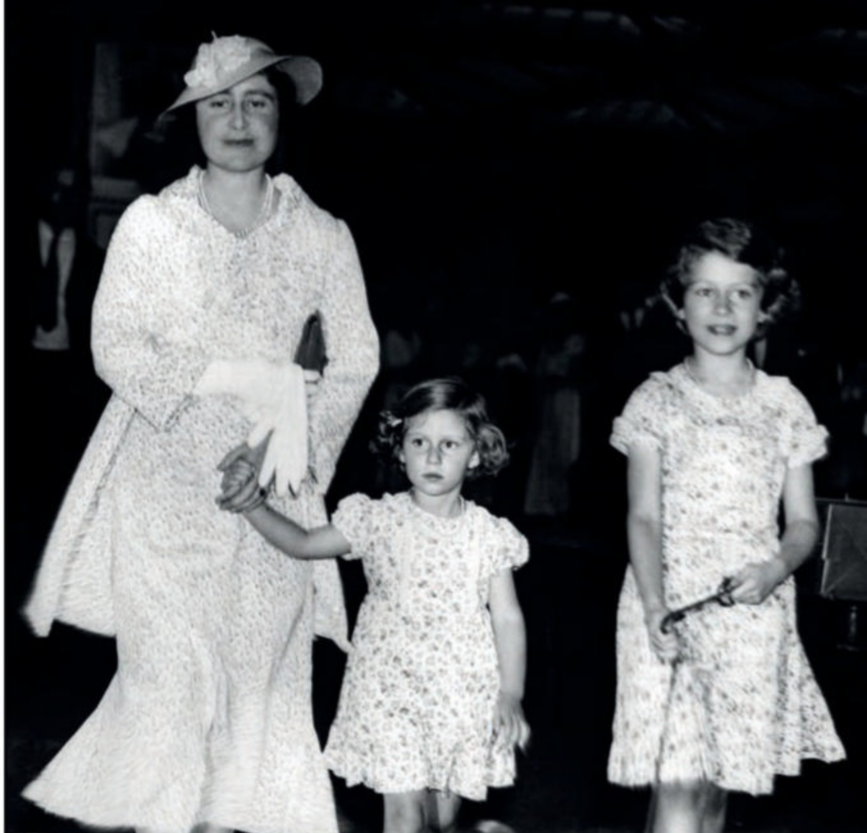
In a curious but apt juxtaposition, Matthew compares the Reville gown to an outfit worn by the late fashion designer Vivienne Westwood when she received her Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire honour (DBE). "Vivienne Westwood had worked with our collection, she knew it, and knew the historic rules of court dress." Westwood's design has a train, attached at the shoulders like the 1928 Reville, but its deconstructed punk aesthetic – instead of ostrich plumes she glued horns to her temple – brings a modernity to the collection. "It shows the collection is part of a continuing tradition of clothing worn at the royal court".

The earliest piece in the exhibition – a man's suit – dates from the 1770s, the period when court

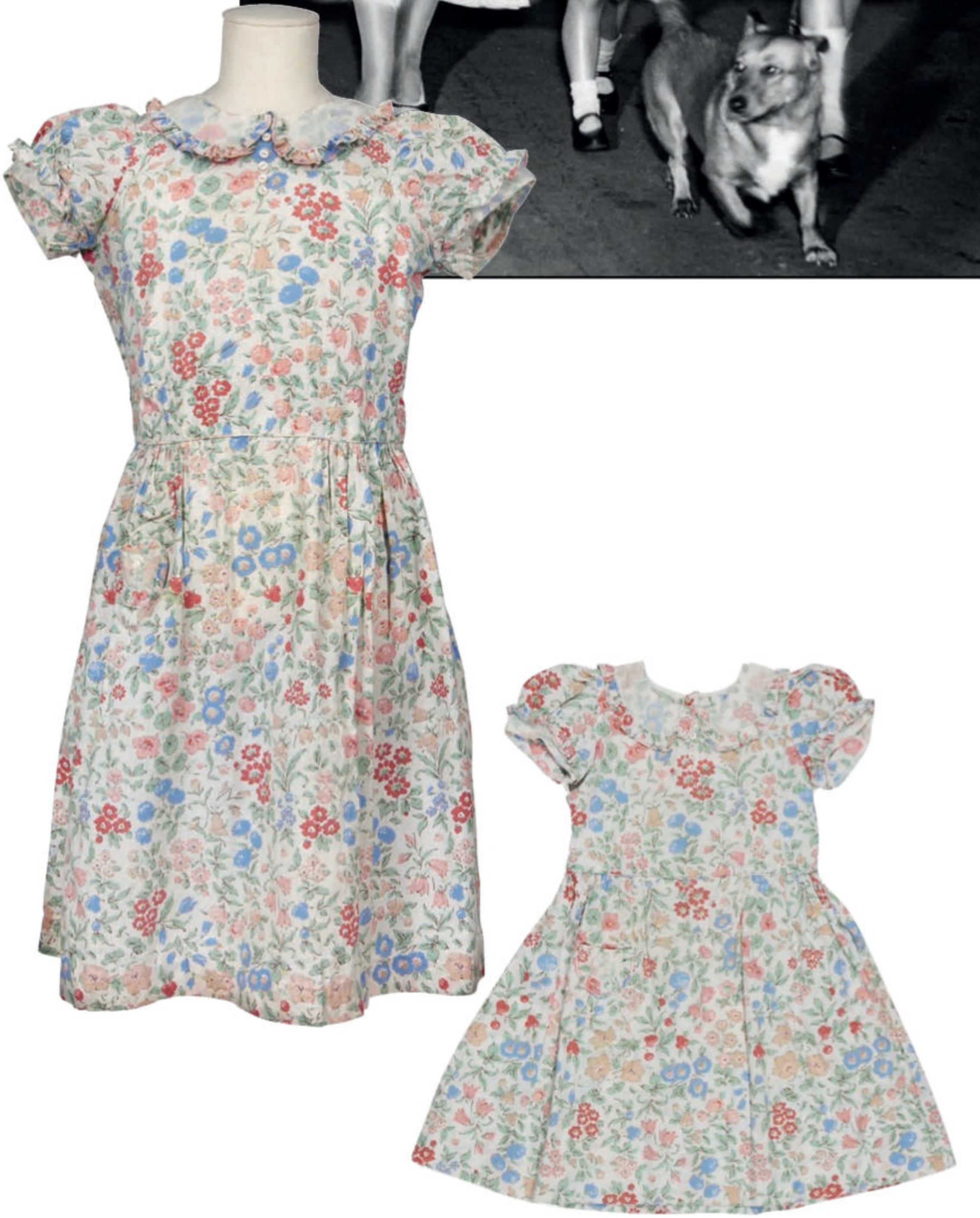
▸

In their own form of codified dressing, the young princesses Elizabeth and Margaret were often identically attired





Previous page, left to right: A 1928 beaded couture Reville gown designed for Lady Holcroft; *Dress Codes* will be held at Kensington Palace
Left to right: A 1980 Jose "Pitoy" Moreno dress worn by Princess Margaret; this Catherine Walker evening dress was worn by the late Diana, Princess of Wales; matching Liberty print cotton dresses worn by Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret; the young royals with their mother, Queen Elizabeth, in 1935



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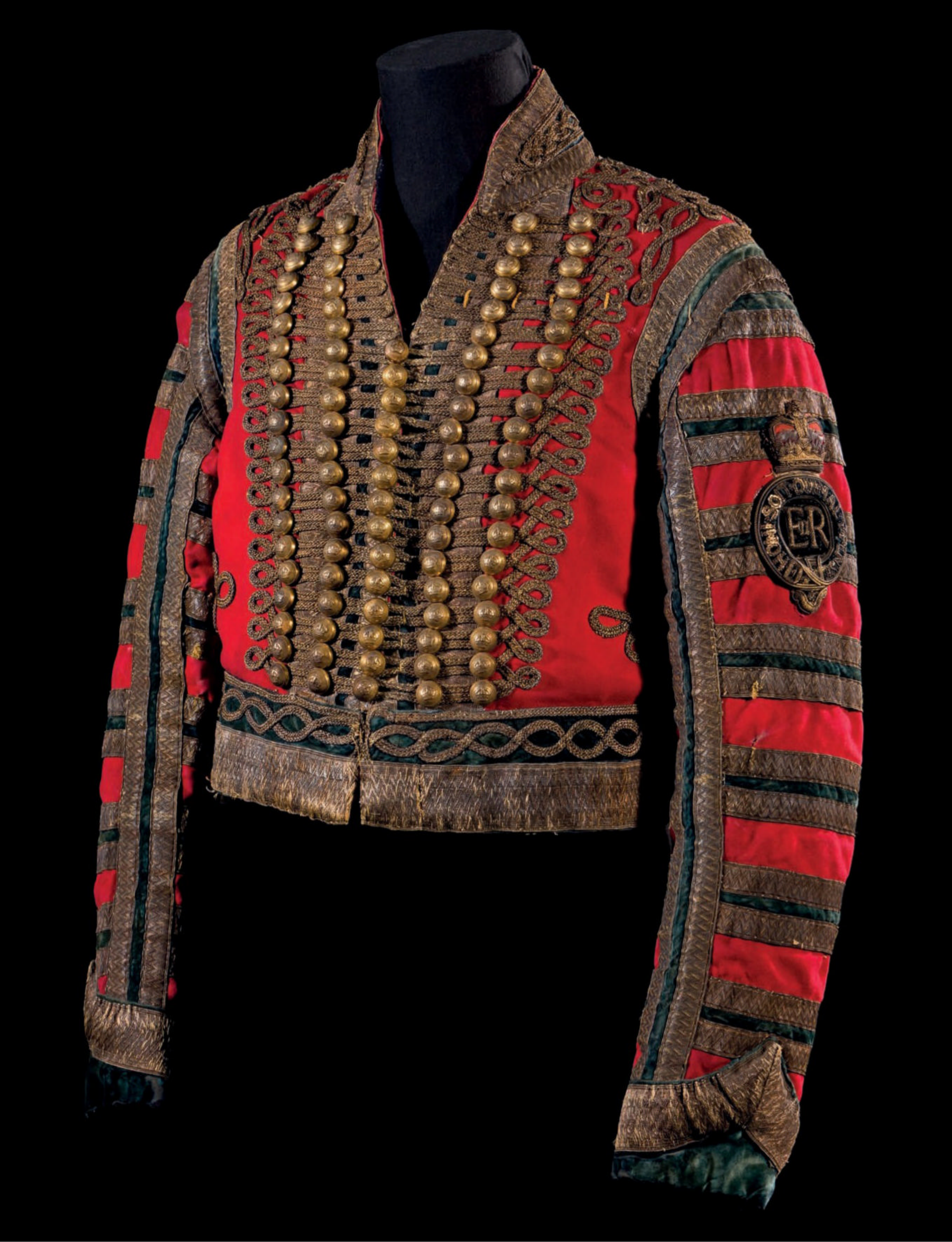
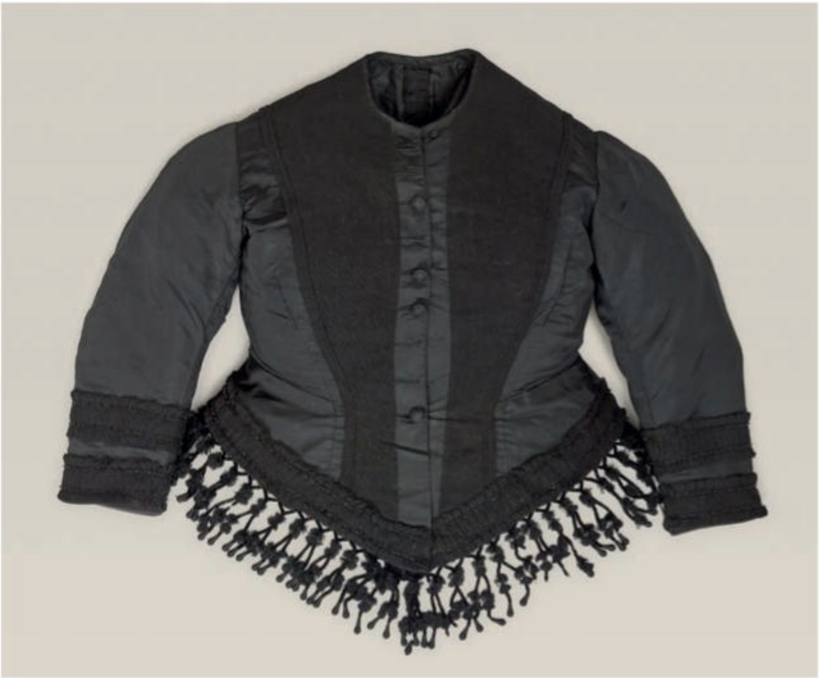


fashion really began to be codified. Some pieces reflect the ultimate codification in dress: uniform, an area in which Historic Royal Palace's collection is particularly strong. Matthew is always looking for the uniforms that, on top of looking amazing, tell a human tale. "We have a beautiful outfit worn by a postilion, who rides one of the horses pulling the state coach," he says. "It's absolutely stunning – gold braid, velvet, red wool, brass buttons. I love the way that when you start looking at it closely it's got the names of the men who wore it inside. The earliest is 1902 but it has a cypher of Queen Elizabeth II, which means it was worn until at least 1952. It's got quite a few quite rough repairs where it had to be patched up. I worked with a conservator on who said, 'we can make these repairs neater,' but I said 'no, let's keep them as part of the story'."

A similar decision was made with something altogether humbler: two little cotton dresses worn by the young princesses Elizabeth and Margaret. In their own form of codified dressing, they were often identically attired, but they were also children. "The larger one has been let out for a growing child," points out Matthew, "they've taken the hem up and you can see it's been more roughly sewn on and the fabric has been used to let it out at the sides and the bodice. Instantly you see how that household, like everyone in the 1930s, knew how to make things last". The dresses were eventually given to the girls' nanny, Clara Knight, and passed down the family as treasured heirlooms, a common way items of Royal clothing have survived.

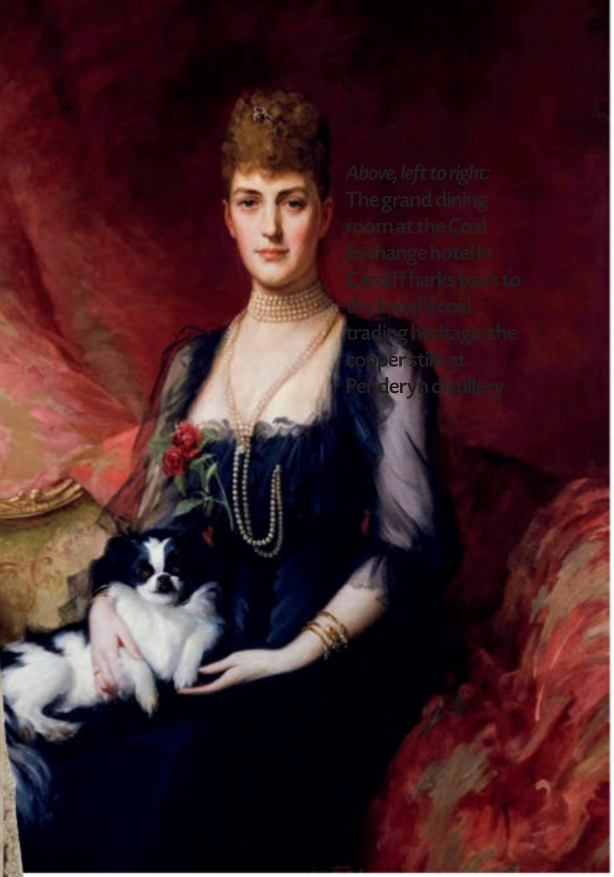
Two dresses worn by the adult Princess Margaret, also in the exhibition, were given to her maid. Never displayed in the UK before, the 1978 Thea Porter and 1980 Jose "Pitoy" Moreno evening gowns are reminders – if reminders are needed – that the spirited princess was a true leader of fashion, creating her ▶



Opposite: **A postilion court uniform jacket dating from 1902** *This page, top to bottom:* **Queen Victoria in 1866, in the early years of her bereavement, wearing full black mourning dress; one of the monarch's bodices from this era; curator Matthew examines the finer details of an ornate Japanese court suit**

PHOTOS: © INCAMERASTOCK/ALAMY/RICHARD LEA-HAIR/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

Top to bottom: **This painting of Queen Alexandra of Denmark, c. 1894, conveys the Queen Consort's distinct sense of style; a 1978 Thea Porter evening gown worn by Princess Margaret**



Above, left to right: The grand dining room at the Coal Exchange hotel in Cardiff harks back to the hotel's coal trading heritage; the copper stills at Penderyn distillery

own conventions.

Sometimes it is hard to tell whether the conventions are set by royalty or whether they are reinforcing rules by conforming to them. When Queen Victoria's beloved Albert died in 1861 she began a 40-year period of grief. Victoria was not the first to wear deep mourning, but by so publicly presenting herself as a widow, she strengthened existing mores.

Historic Royal Palaces have recently acquired a bodice from the early years of Victoria's bereavement. Dating to the late 1860s or very early 1870s, the bodice is, as Matthew puts it, "the rarest of the rare. Almost nothing survives from this date. It's never been seen in public before, never even been displayed. This is its first outing, and it is so important because it speaks of the first ten years after Albert's death – the hardest, when she was in the deepest mourning." Once again, the item has survived because it was passed to a servant who kept it in the family. "It's incredible what people have in their attics," says Matthew.

Another outfit in the exhibition was worn by Victoria's daughter-in-law, Queen Alexandra. At first sight, the 1912 Ascot dress, in a light summer fabric, looks like a regular outfit worn by a woman famous for her sense of style, but this, too, conveys grief. Alexandra was a relatively young woman when her eldest son Albert Victor died in 1892, and while she remained a trendsetter, she wore the codified colours of half-mourning – mauve, white and black – for the rest of her life.

Other garments, such as a Bruce Oldfield gown worn by Diana, Princess of Wales, on a visit to Saudi Arabia in 1987, show the clear-cut rules for diplomatic visits abroad. The honour went both ways: another extremely rare exhibit is in the form of an early 20th-century Japanese man's court suit that blends European style with Japanese motifs, treading the delicate diplomatic path that must be undertaken whenever two cultures meet.

The suit is an example of conservation in action. Members of the collection team visited experts in Japan to learn how to stabilise and secure the fabric for long-term storage, but they research how to display items too. "From custom dying nets to mounting items on mannequins, so that they are properly supported and retain the correct historic shape, this exhibition is also a quiet testament to the skill of our conservators," says Matthew. "They are real heroes". B

Dress Codes **opens at Kensington Palace on 13 March and runs until 30 November. hrp.org.uk**

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Charlestown itself is a delight to explore. This historic maritime village is known for the Tall Ships in its fine Georgian harbour, which has featured on screen in period dramas such as *Poldark*. The scenic South West Coast Path is also on your doorstep: a picturesque clifftop trail that takes in some of Cornwall's loveliest spots.

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Closing date for entries is 12pm GMT on 12 May 2025. The prize must be taken by 12 October 2025, and is for two adults sharing a room, including breakfast, dinner on one evening (three courses and two drinks per person), a tour of St Austell Brewery (with two-course lunch at Hicks Bar for two with two drinks each), and a case of Proper Job IPA (12 x 500ml bottles), posted to the winner's home address. Not valid on bank holidays or during school holidays, and excludes August. The prize cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer, is subject to availability, non-transferable, and travel is not included.

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Attenborough's Britain

Sir David Attenborough's reputation as the greatest naturalist ever to have lived is without question. Yet, for all the admiration he holds for the countries of the world, the 98-year-old's most cherished place remains his home nation

PHOTO: © UKTV/MILES BARTON

Previous page: **Sir David is passionate about Britain's rich green spaces and diverse wildlife**
Left, clockwise from top: **The Blickling Estate in Norfolk is Attenborough's favourite National Trust property; Richmond Park's wild deer; Lindisfarne is a haven for wildlife**

He's one of the most travelled people alive; an explorer of wildlife and wilderness, and someone who, in over 70 years of broadcasting, has transformed the way we view, understand and care for the world around us. From the Grand Canyon to the Galapagos Islands, Sir David Attenborough stands as the perfect tour guide for the planet's very furthest environmental extremities.

Yet, when asked to name his favourite place he responds – as any right-thinking man would – "Richmond, Surrey!"

He adds, "Richmond is a beautiful pocket of London – it's not quite in the city… it's right on the cusp. And it is wonderful. I've been to the Great Barrier Reef many times, the wilds of the Amazon; I've ventured to both the Arctic and Antarctica, yet there's something so lovely and warming about watching the deer in Richmond Park while the morning mist rises up. It's one of life's simplest yet greatest gifts."

Indeed, while Attenborough's passion for travel is well documented, the broadcaster retains a strong desire to be at home – something that, on the face of it, seems sensible given that 8 May next year will mark his 100th birthday. "Britain holds the most special place in my heart," he says, "which may sound strange coming from someone who has visited over 80 countries. Yet variety, depth, beauty – it is a place I can never grow tired of."

Attenborough admits the UK's broad and diverse sweep of flora and fauna, ecology and geology, certainly helps when it comes to sating a passion for the natural world. "Wildlife is all around us in Britain. Almost a fifth of London is parkland and green space; and beyond we have wonderfully exposed rural areas, gardens of National Trust properties – my favourite probably the Blickling Estate in Norfolk – the lush green banks of the River Stour in Suffolk, glorious purple heather on moors and heaths across the island, and incredible coastal locations."

Indeed, he notes that Britain benefits hugely as an island nation, with the sea bringing so much to the land whilst also ensuring that what exists here is preserved. "Give me a craggy, cliffside location where I can explore wildlife amongst marvellous geology such as is found down near Purbeck and along the Jurassic Coast in Dorset, over a long sand-swept beach, even if some of those around Devon and up on the north-east coast are simply spectacular.

"Up that way you also have Lindisfarne, an incredible sanctuary for wildlife that becomes disconnected from the mainland when the road in floods twice a day. Then the Lake District, across to the majesty of the Pembrokeshire countryside in Wales. What I'm saying is that there's a marvel at every corner, and we are lucky here to have extraordinary ecosystems on our doorstep."

Interestingly, for someone whose life has been defined by the natural world, Attenborough doesn't just stick to green spaces when at home, even with Kew Gardens – founded in 1840 and home to the largest and most diverse botanical and mycological collections in the world – in close proximity. In truth, he's partial to coffee, a pint and an evening out, just like the rest of us!

"It's funny – I think everyone believes I spend my life buried in the undergrowth somewhere, but I do love entertainment, music, art. I'm even rather attracted to a few hours in the pub, so it's not all animals and plants for me!" ▶

> **"There's something so lovely about watching the deer in Richmond Park while the morning mist rises up. It's one of life's greatest gifts"**

PHOTOS: © ANDREW BUTLER/JOHN MILLAR/NATIONAL TRUST; HUMBLE BEE FILMS; VISITLONDON.COM/JON REID

He enjoys the culture, colour and theatre of central London – an admirer of the vibrancy of people, of lights, and architecture. “City life is a nice juxtaposition to everything in the wild and I’ve always felt it’s there to be enjoyed.” And the English capital isn’t the only urban spot that gets a special mention: the Midlands city of Leicester provided a crucial foundation for his career as a biologist.

“Leicester shaped my early years. The memories of Abbey Park and the River Soar are inseparable from my childhood. It was there that I discovered and began to understand fossils, with the limestone quarries a hunting ground for exploration of what lay just beneath the surface of the soil.”

Attenborough also notes Bristol in the south west as being significant not just for him, but his employers of seven decades, the BBC. “It’s a real city of style, of culture, of innovation. The BBC’s Natural History Unit is based there, and that’s where groundbreaking documentaries including *Life on Earth* and *The Blue Planet* were conceived. I’ve enjoyed exploring Bristol’s history, its culture – and the surrounding areas, in geological terms, are quite, quite stunning, from Clifton Downs to Avon Gorge.”

Cambridge and the Isle of Wight are also places that have enchanted him. “I obtained a degree in natural sciences at Cambridge and that was where interactions with experts and professors really gave me the confidence to believe I could make a career out of this passion of mine. And to this day, Cambridge’s unique blend of academia and environment is unparalleled.

“As for the Isle of Wight, so much of it is frozen in time – coastal beauty, chalk cliffs, sandy beaches, with rock pools, wider geology and rich fossil beds that date back to the age of dinosaurs.”

“So much of the Isle of Wight is frozen in time – coastal beauty, chalk cliffs, sandy beaches, with rock pools and rich fossil beds”

The public first encountered Attenborough’s characteristic warm, winding narrations way back in 1954 on BBC1 programme *Zoo Quest*. “We had six people in the department and the programming was awful,” he laughs. “Knitting, short stories, religion, politicians, cooking, gardening, archaeology – we covered them all, and we covered it pretty badly! Yet there was such a thirst for knowledge so we couldn’t really fail.”

He explains that even when he went to Cambridge University in 1945, people still didn’t believe continents drifted around the surface of the Earth. “Now such a fact is not only accepted, but it forms the absolute basis for understanding volcanoes and tsunamis,” he says. “You simply can’t make sense of the world now without knowing that sort of thing; in the same way that carbon dating and, many years later, DNA profiling, provided us with insights into the past we could never have imagined.”

In 2025, those insights lead Sir David to his new project, *Ocean*, a feature-length documentary premiering globally on National Geographic and streamed on Disney+ and Hulu. In it, he documents the changing health of the world’s oceans, sharing how we can, and must, restore the glory of Earth’s vast, interconnected waters.

For Attenborough, it’s yet another step on a path of absolute discovery. “I look back over how much knowledge we have acquired, and how accessible now our understanding of the world is, and I’m glad to have been a part of that. So glad.

“At the end of it though, I am just there to provide the words – nature is the real star!”

Left, clockwise from top: **The Isle of Wight’s freshwater bays and chalk cliffs date back to prehistoric times; Sir David Attenborough produced the Queen’s Christmas broadcast for the BBC from 1986 until 1991; the Avon Gorge near Bristol**

PHOTOS: © EYE35.PIX/MARTIN BACHE/ALAMY; JOAN WILLIAMS/SHUTTERSTOCK

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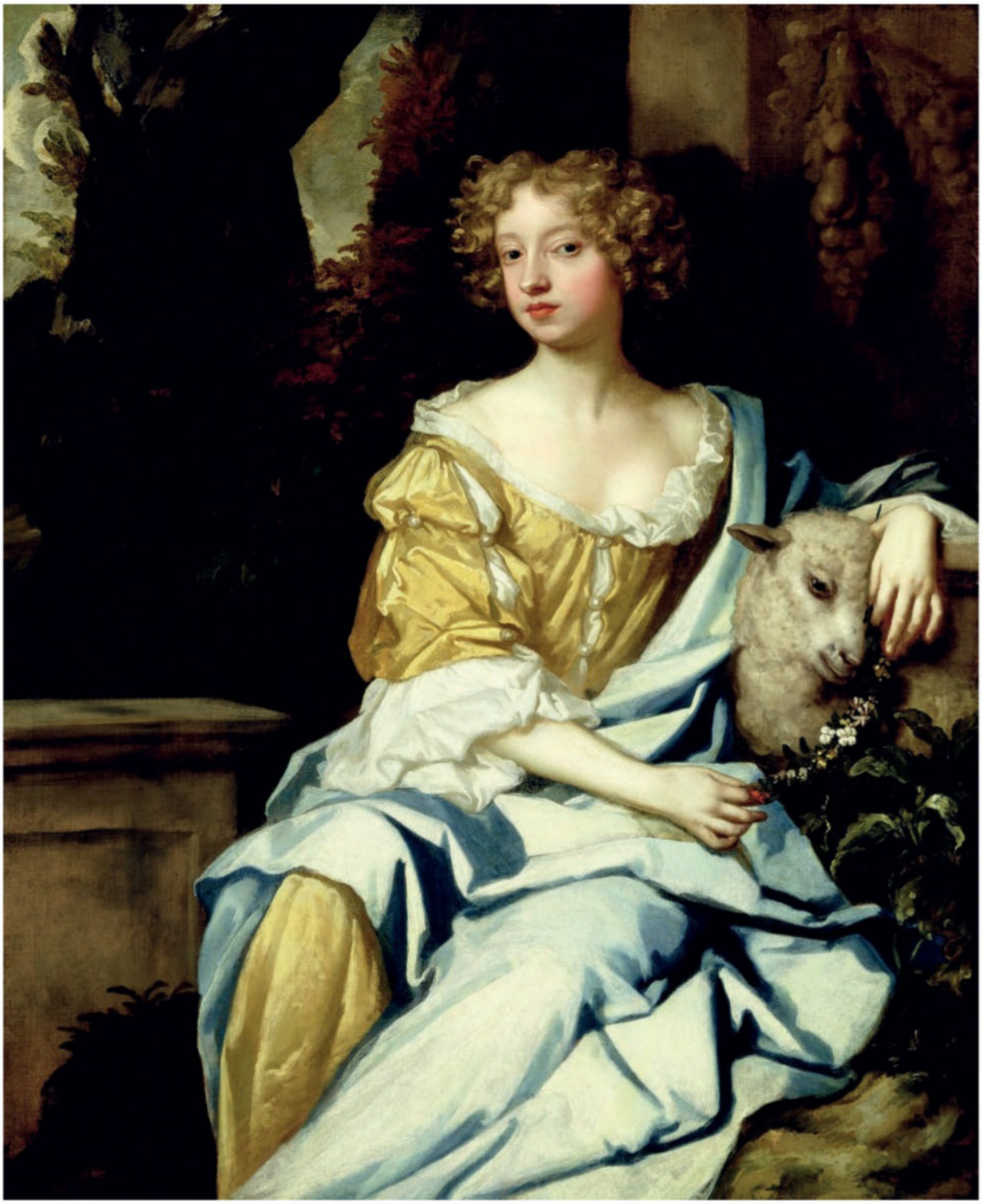
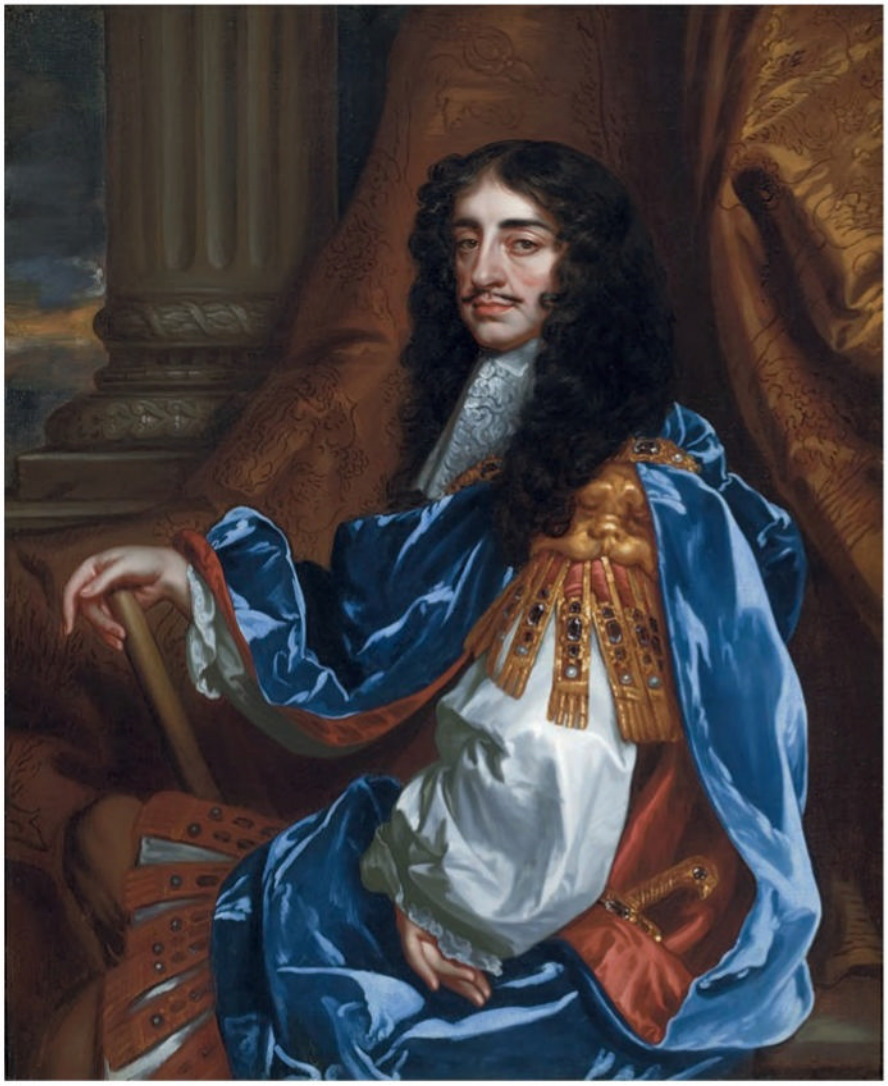


PHOTO: © NATIONAL TRUST PHOTOGRAPHIC LIBRARY/JOHN HAMMOND/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Pretty, witty Nell

Eleanor 'Nell' Gwyn, born 375 years ago, is England's most famous royal mistress, who made her name on the stage and was known for her bawdy high spirits

WORDS **NEIL JONES**



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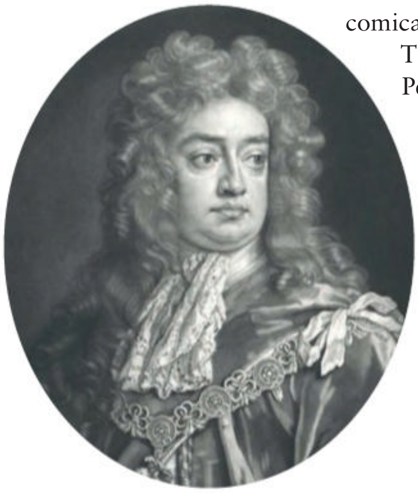


***Previous page:* Portrait of Nell Gwyn by the studio of Sir Peter Lely *Clockwise from above:* Charles II; Nell inspired Charles to establish the Royal Hospital; the Theatre Royal Drury Lane; Nell's Pall Mall home; her former lover Lord Buckhurst**

One March day in 1667, a 17-year-old actress took to the London stage as the heroine Florimell in John Dryden's new tragicomedy, *Secret Love*. It was a 'breeches role', in which for plot purposes she appeared disguised as a man in trousers, allowing audiences to gawp at her shapely legs. The description of Florimell's "Ovall face, clear skin, hazle eyes, thick brown Eye-browes, and Hair" is a true-life portrait of the actress, who stole the show and moved diarist Samuel Pepys to rave that he had never seen "so great performance of a comical part".

The actress was Nell Gwyn, called by Pepys "pretty, witty Nell" and known to history as the most popular of Charles II's numerous mistresses. As England threw off the restraining puritanical shackles of the Interregnum (1649–60) and danced to the restored king's merry tune, Nell embodied the droll, reckless, fun-loving spirit of the times. Hers is also that eternally appealing story of rags-to-riches ascent.

Eleanor Gwyn – Nell – was born 375 years ago in February 1650, with London, Hereford and Oxford each claiming her birthplace. Her father was likely Thomas Gwyn, a captain in the Royalist army who is believed to have died in a debtors' prison. Her mother Helena kept a bawdyhouse (brothel-cum-drinking establishment) in the Covent Garden district of London, where Nell was raised "to fill strong waters [brandy] to the gentlemen". She possibly also collected cinders to re-sell for fuel, or was a street vendor of fish.

Under Cromwell's Commonwealth, 'frivolous' theatres had been closed down, but Charles II promptly sanctioned two new London acting companies. Significantly for Nell's tale, women (rather than boy actors) began to play female parts in performances, endorsed by royal patent in 1662, becoming the first professional English actresses.

Nell's introduction into this exciting new world came when she was recruited, along with her older sister Rose, to sell oranges between acts in plays performed by the King's Company at the Theatre Royal (later rebuilt and now known as Drury Lane). Her beauty and quick wits dealing with rowdy 'gallants' in the audience and passing notes between actresses and their rakish lovers soon got her talent-spotted by the theatre's manager, Thomas Killigrew. She was taken under the wing of the company's charismatic leading actor Charles Hart and would also become his mistress.

Nell's first recorded role, aged 15 in 1665, as Cydaria in Dryden's *The Indian Emperor* served only to show she wasn't cut out for serious acting. But in comedies, including breeches parts, she excelled: her cheeky natural humour and nudge-and-a-wink rapport with audiences marking her out. In a raunchy world where actresses' roles and real lives became enmeshed, there was also a prophetic ring to the words she spoke in 1668 as Donna Jacintha in Dryden's *An Evening's Love*. Wildblood (played by Hart) asks what a

►

Embodying the droll, reckless, fun-loving spirit of the times, Nell's is that eternally appealing story of rags-to-riches ascent

PHOTOS: © NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/JOHN HAMMOND/ACCESS RIGHTS FROM BTEU/AUSMUM/REUTERS/ROBERT EVANS/ALAMY/PHILIP VILE

LLOQUE FRACTORUM CONDIDIT CAROLUS SECUNDUS

gentleman is to expect from her and Jacintha replies:

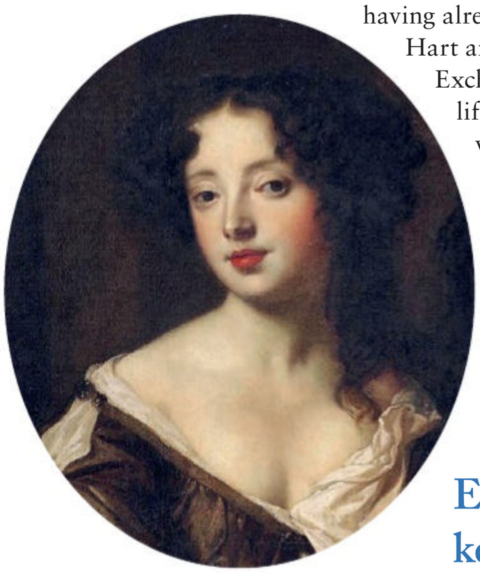
"To be admitted to pass my time with, while a better comes: to be the lowest step in my staircase, for a knight to mount upon him, and a lord upon him, and a duke upon him till I get as high as I can climb." Charles II was in the audience and by the following year she had become his mistress.

Nell jokingly referred to the king as her Charles III, having already notched up lovers in Charles Hart and Charles, Lord Buckhurst. Exchanging the glitz of stage acting for life as a royally kept woman, she would surround herself in luxury, including a house in Pall Mall boasting a four-poster silver bedstead.

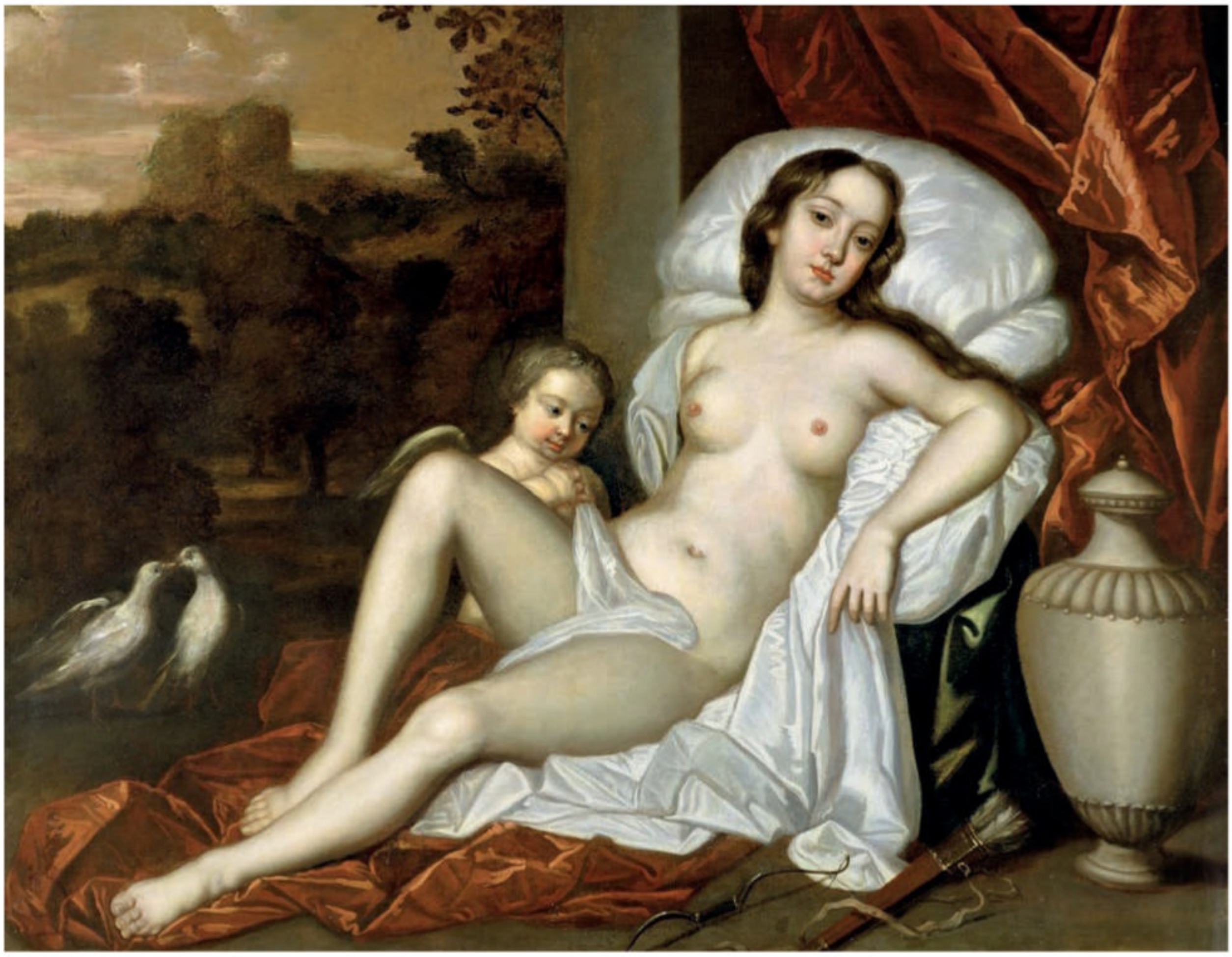
Nell faced plenty of competition from other royal mistresses (each endured with varying degrees of patience by Charles' wife, Catherine of Braganza). With typical chutzpah, Nell slipped a laxative to rival actress Moll Davis, just before the poor woman dined with the king. Meanwhile, her greatest rival, Louise de Kérouaille, echoed court snobbery by saying that "anybody may know [Nell] has been an orange wench by her swearing." Unabashed, Nell continued her fruity ways and called Louise "Squintabella" (she had a slight cast in one eye).

The public loved Nell for never forgetting her roots; she gave money to the poor and, according to tradition, encouraged Charles in the foundation of the Royal Hospital Chelsea for soldiers "broken by age and war". One day in Oxford crowds harangued her coach, believing Kérouaille – unpopular as a French Catholic – was inside, but anger changed to cheers when Nell stuck her head from the window and humorously cried: "Pray, good people, be civil, I am the Protestant whore!"

Charles would listen to Nell's views on matters, as he did with other mistresses (to the great annoyance of his ministers). But most of all he enjoyed her unpretentious company and relaxed ways: as party hostess, playing ▶



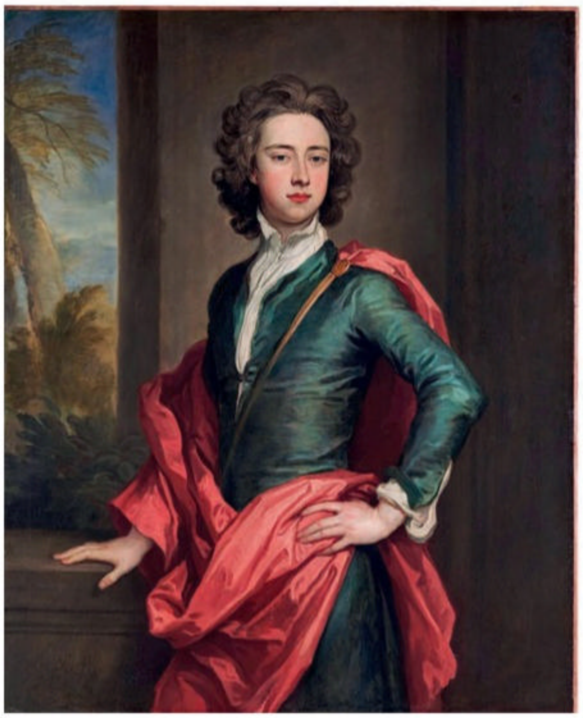
Exchanging the glitz of stage acting for life as a royally kept woman, Nell surrounded herself in luxury



Clockwise from above: **Nell's arch-nemesis, Louise de Kérouaille, by Sir Peter Lely's studio; the Newmarket home Charles II bought for Nell; the site of his former Newmarket Palace, which is now the Rothschild Yard and Stables; Nell was likely the model for *A Young Woman and Child as Venus and Cupid*, by the studio of Sir Peter Lely**

PHOTOS: © HISTORIC IMAGES/KUMAR SRISKANDAN/ALAMY/ROTHSCHILD YARD/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Restricted Zone ENDS
Nell Gwynne's House



cards together, going to the horse-races and gambling at Newmarket, where the house he provided for her still exists and she is recalled by the Nell Gwyn Stakes race.

Nell bore Charles two sons. James, the younger, died as a child, but the King ennobled the elder, his namesake Charles, as Earl of Burford (and later Duke of St Albans) after Nell allegedly dangled the boy from a window and threatened to drop him if a title was not forthcoming.

Yet however close king and commoner were, Nell's status excluded her from gathering at Charles' deathbed in 1685; he did not forget her, though, asking his brother James to "not let poor Nelly starve". The new King James II honoured the dying wish, paid off Nell's debts run up through extravagant living, and granted her a pension. She would die following a stroke and partial paralysis just two years later, a mere 37 years old, and was buried in London's Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields. Pretty, witty Nell, a true spirit of the Restoration, had played her part for all it was worth.

Clockwise from above: **Nell and Charles's son, Charles the eventual 1st Duke of St Albans, painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller, c.1690; trailblazing female playwright Aphra Behn; St Martin-in-the-Fields, Nell's final resting place**

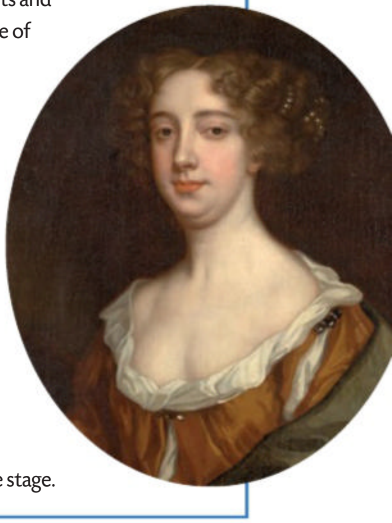
ACTING THE PART

During the Interregnum the Royalist court spent much time in exile on the Continent, where actresses were an accepted feature of theatres, so it's not surprising that at his Restoration Charles II allowed English women to tread the boards in the re-opened London theatres.

The actresses quickly became a big draw for audiences, their beauty to be ogled at, sometimes in states of undress or displaying shapely legs in 'breeches parts', sending up men's behaviour. Being an actress was deemed not quite respectable, and they were less well paid than male counterparts, though well-to-do lovers or even husbands were to be found among show-goers.

Restoration plays ranged from tragedies to – most famously – bawdy satires and glittering critical comedies. Female roles became increasingly written for specific, popular actresses: Nell Gwyn was comedy gold. Moll Davis, said to be the illegitimate daughter of a colonel (later earl), was renowned for singing and dancing. Comedienne Susanna Mountfort (née Percival), the daughter of an actor, was adept at both breeches parts and grotesque characters, making "no scruple of defacing her fair Form".

Anne Bracegirdle, known for her chastity in life and on stage, specialised in charming heiresses, while Elizabeth Barry, the daughter of a barrister who had fallen on hard times, was the most versatile actress of all: she excelled at both comedy and tragedy, including a star turn as Lady Galliard in the cynical social comedy *The City Heiress* (1682) by pioneering female playwright Aphra Behn. These, and many more, blazed a trail for professional English actresses to take the stage.



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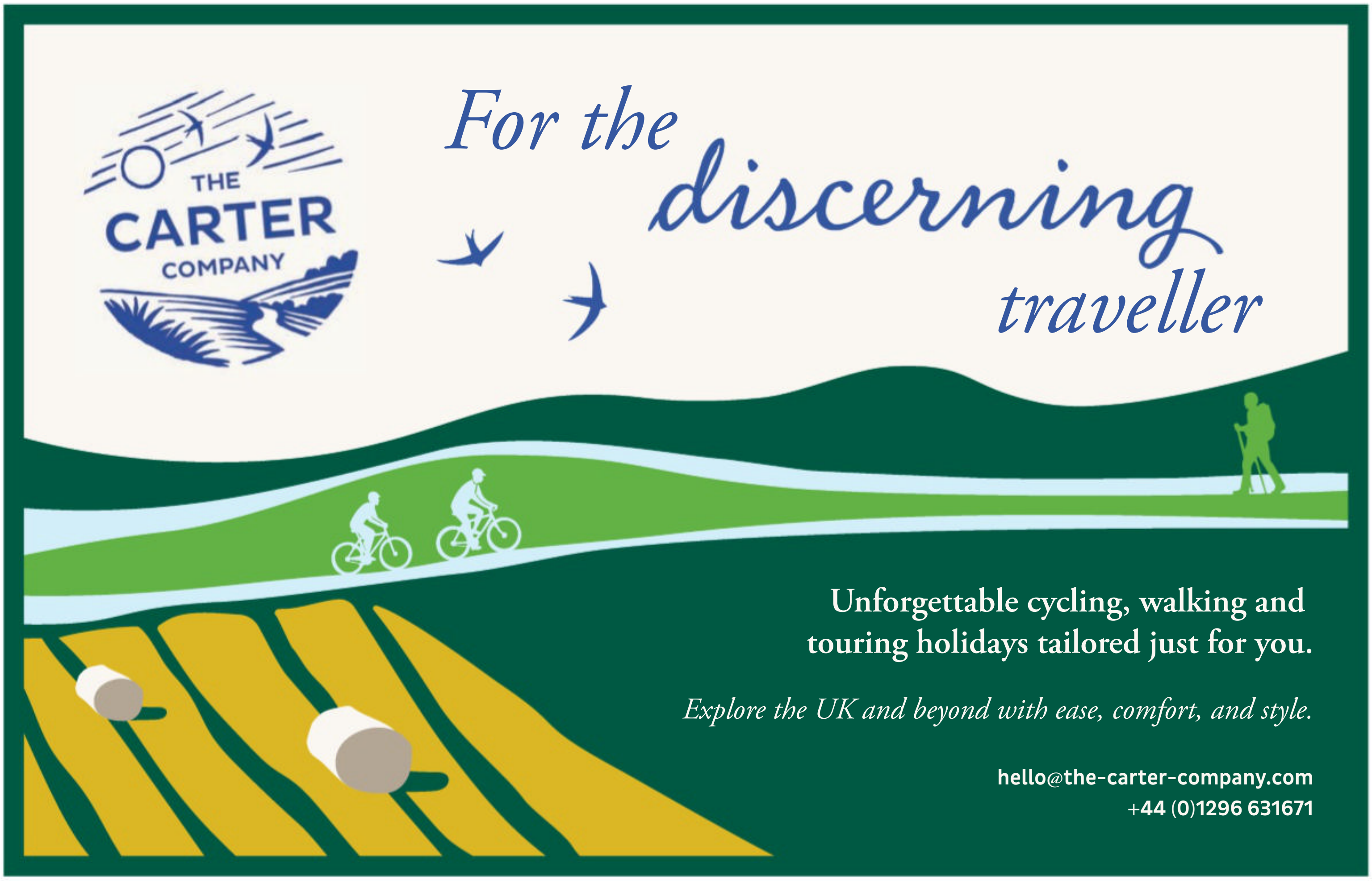

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TALLY HO!

The Tweed Run is more than just a bicycle ride. It's nothing less than a cultural sensation showcasing what Britain does best

WORDS **ISOBEL KING**

Left: **Dapper cyclists on the streets of central London**
Below: **The route takes in landmarks such as Big Ben**

"It's outrageously good fun," smiles Mark Holdstock, summing up what has become a cornerstone event in Britain's cultural calendar. "Each year the sheer sight of 1,000 cyclists all dressed to the nines atop beautiful bicycles is an amazing sight to behold."

As a founder, you might well expect Holdstock to wax lyrical about his brainchild, The Tweed Run. But he could defy anyone not to be taken with the occasion. Since 2009, participants have donned their well-pressed best and cycled through London, stopping along the way to take tea and have a picnic, rounding things off with an old-fashioned knees-up in the afternoon. Marshals keep traffic at bay, making way for the cheery, rosy-cheeked participants who ripple past landmarks such as Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, the Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral.

"It's a wonderful way to take in the city in all its glory," says Megan Burroughs, longstanding Creative Director. "The route changes each year and is designed to be a jaunty cycle ride taking in iconic London landmarks, whilst also giving participants a glimpse at less-trodden streets of our historic city. Each year we meticulously plan out the route to give riders something a little bit new."

What stays the same every year are the impressive bicycles that people bring along. ▶

PHOTOS: © TWEED RUN/BEN BROOMFIELD

Clockwise from above: **The procession is awash with stylish checks, vintage millinery and tailored waistcoats; marshals line the route; participants stop for tea along the way; the Best Dressed award category is hotly contested; Penny Farthings are dotted throughout the fleet**

PHOTOS: © TWEED RUN/BEN BROOMFIELD

Pashley designs abound, such as the Princess Sovereign or Britannica in racing green or duck egg blue, as well as, of course, the inimitable Penny Farthing. Riders tower above the crowds on this pleasingly antique mode of transportation, unencumbered by gears, suspension or even brakes!

Akin to Royal Ascot, the essence of The Tweed Run lies in the attire – a celebration of timeless British style and the enduring appeal of tweed. The term 'overdressed' does not exist in the occasion's vocabulary, with tweed suits, plus fours, bowties, and jaunty flat caps all warmly encouraged. Sporty cycling capes are suggested for the ladies along with a sustaining hip flask for each and everyone involved. Unlike Ascot, a bowler rather than a top hat is recommended – being a touch more aerodynamic.

Aspiring for the Best Dressed prizes awarded on the day, "many make their own outfits and spend hours searching through vintage shops and markets," reveals Burroughs, "but there's also plenty of tweed readily available on the high street. It's really a very mixed bag!" Certain commentators have credited the Tweed Run with bringing the fabric back into fashion, with some going as far as to say that it helped save the Harris Tweed industry, which prior to 2009 was floundering. For Burroughs, tweed's use in major fashion shows and clothing collaborations prove the fabric is not only classic, but consistently compelling. "The Tweed Run encapsulates this enduring aesthetic, inviting participants to revel in the beauty of garments that never go out of style" – made from this most British of materials.

The term 'overdressed' does not exist in the occasion's vocabulary, with tweed suits, plus fours and jaunty flat caps all warmly encouraged

The idea for the bicycle ride was inspired by vintage sporting events of the past, harking back to a time when cycling wasn't dominated by tight Lycra but by tweed. "Traditionally, this was what you would wear to cycle – a reminder that you don't need flashy, fluorescent outfits to enjoy a day out on a bike," Holdstock points out. "We wanted to promote the idea of longevity, that just because something comes from the past doesn't mean it should be dismissed. Doing things well, with care and craftsmanship, is far better than succumbing to today's throwaway culture."

Judging by the Run's popularity, it's a principle that chimes with the nation. "It all began on Savile Row on a chilly February morning with just a couple of hundred cyclists, but the event's charm has snowballed into something much larger," Holdstock adds.

So far there have been Tweed Runs in New York City, Tuscany and Tokyo (to name but a few ▶

ARSHAL

CORDINGS

485
TWEED
15

Left: The sartorially sophisticated peloton passes Buckingham Palace, among other key London landmarks on the Tweed Run route, which changes annually

locations) projecting a vision of British humour, style and eccentricity far beyond our own borders. "Our hopes are to keep growing and sharing its unique charm."

Still, there's more substance than style behind all those red-lipsticked smiles, vintage velocipedes and Harris Tweed jackets. "Above all, we want to keep inspiring communities to come together and enjoy the simple joy of cycling," says Holdstock earnestly, and there's a palpable sense of community spirit and shared experience at the events, both between the riders and those who flock to cheer them on. Many riders return year after year – something the founders find deeply humbling. "It's about togetherness, [and] that feels especially meaningful in today's fast-paced world."

"Many participants tell us the Tweed Run is a bucket-list experience – a testament to its charm and the deep sense of connection it fosters," says Burroughs. "It's free from screens, free from any sort of technology, inviting riders to rediscover the simple, poetic joy of hopping on a bicycle and having a delightful jaunt through the world's greatest city. It's this collective spirit that makes it not just an event but a quintessentially British phenomenon." And not a scrap of lycra in sight! B

The next Tweed Run will take place on Saturday 26 April. Tickets are available via tweedrun.com

PEDALLING THROUGH TIME

Fasten your helmet and tinkle that bell for this speedy history of bicycle design

The MacMillan (1839)
Blacksmith Kirkpatrick MacMillan was the first to invent the pedal-driven bicycle and amazingly managed to cycle his creation more than 70 miles: from Thornhill, near Dumfries, to Glasgow. He never patented his design, leading many to copy him, but recently a fully functioning replica of the bicycle was built by cycling apparel brand Endura for its Forgotten Legend project.

Boneshaker (1860s)
A rather uncomfortable ride to say the least, given the wrought-iron frame and wooden wheels! According to the Science Museum, it was first developed in France by Pierre Michaux, Pierre Lallement and the Olivier brothers in the 1860s, but mass-produced in the UK from 1869.

Penny Farthing (1870)
The name comes from the wheels resembling two coins; you've guessed it – the Penny and the Farthing. Tricky to ride but with a unique style, it's grown in popularity and, while it's still a head-turner, don't be surprised if you see one trundling along the streets of London.

Pashley (1926)
Founded in Birmingham by William Rathbone Pashley, these handmade bicycles are ever-popular, with 160 models (or variants of) still in production. England's longest-established bicycle manufacturer, the designs are stylish, romantic and a Tweed Run favourite.

Brompton Fold-Up Bike (1975)
Described by inventor Andrew Ritchie as a 'magic carpet for the city', the lightweight Brompton has an ingenious three-part fold, in a design considered as iconic to London streets as the Routemaster or black cab.

PHOTOS: © TWEED RUN

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Larger than life

Journey across the rolling hills of Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Dorset to see the bold, often baffling chalk figures that have divided historians for centuries

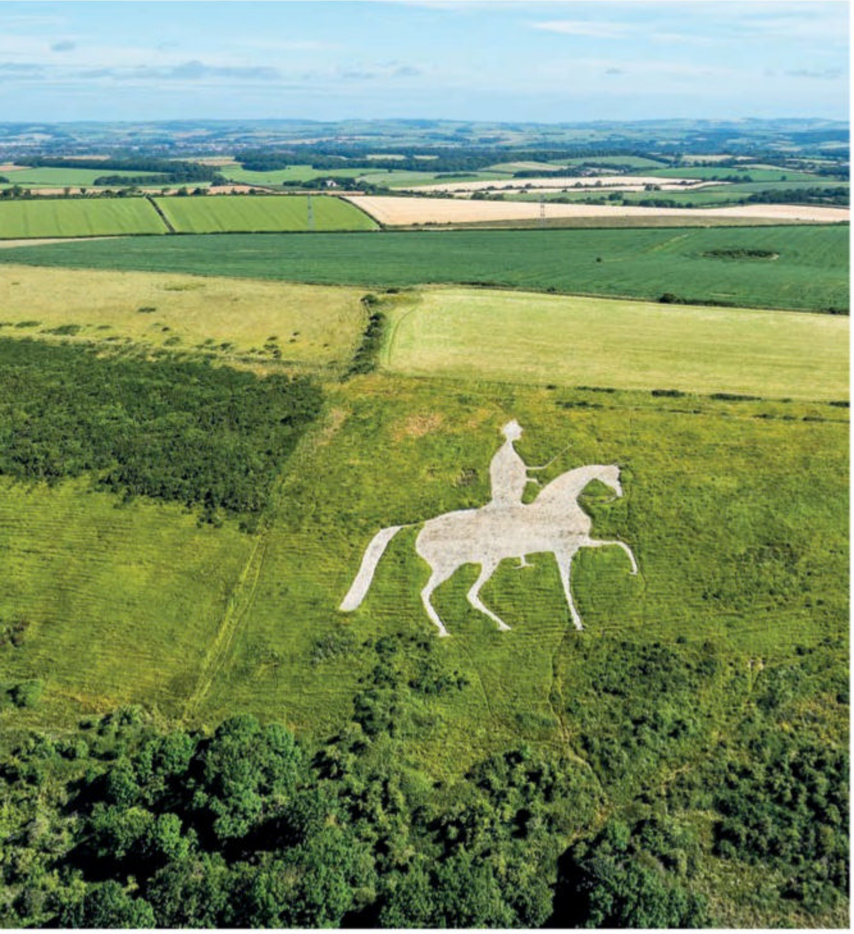
WORDS **LUKE WATERSON**

PHOTO: © JAMES OSMOND/ALAMY

While there are chalk figures in other parts of the world, the swathe of grassy hills that stretch from Oxfordshire in the north-east to Dorset in the south-west are carved with the world's oldest examples, and by far the greatest concentration of them too. The most famous, Oxfordshire's Uffington White Horse and Dorset's Cerne Abbas Giant, are icons of the English countryside. Yet the original purpose of these downland doodles has been very hard for historians to pin down.

Adding to the mystery is that they have been created at various points throughout history: from 800 BC in the case of the most venerable, the Uffington White Horse, up until the turn of the 21st century, when the Devizes White Horse was carved. While stone circles had their heyday in Neolithic Britain, and castles in the medieval era, chalk figures have been carved at the dawn of the Iron Age, in Tudor times and throughout the 20th century. The huge Uffington White Horse was rendered by digging trenches then back-filling them with chalk, while the carving of more recent figures saw the hillside turf scoured away to rock level, and one or two have even been cemented over earlier chalk outlines.

The best way to fathom southern England's enduring fascination with chalk figures is to visit the oldest of them all, and the one upon which many of the ▶



subsequently made figures are based. The Uffington White Horse is the UK's only chalk figure proven to have been etched in prehistory. Historical dating tests put its origins at around 800 BC, although a new technology – optical stimulated luminescence dating – is likely to narrow the window down further during 2025.

"Even in recent years, theories as to why the White Horse was made have been changing," says Andrew Foley, National Trust Warden at White Horse Hill, upon which the Uffington White Horse was scored. "When I started this job in 2010, consensus was that perhaps it was a tribal symbol: a warning to outsiders stating something like 'this is our land – keep away.' But we studied how the horse appeared as you approached from a distance and decided that was unlikely.

"Then similarities were noted between the horse and depictions found on Celtic coins from the Dobunni and Atrebates peoples, who worshipped a horse Goddess named Epona. But 800 BC was a good seven centuries before the coins were made – and before these tribes flourished. Then a theory proposed by Joshua Pollard, an archaeologist at Southampton University, gained weight: that the horse was a

***Previous page:* The Uffington White Horse dates back to 800 BC *Left to right*: The Osmington White Horse in Dorset depicts George III riding away from Weymouth; Wiltshire's Westbury White Horse is so steep that during its recent restoration workers had to abseil down it**

PHOTOS: © MACIEJ OLSZEWSKI/ALAMY

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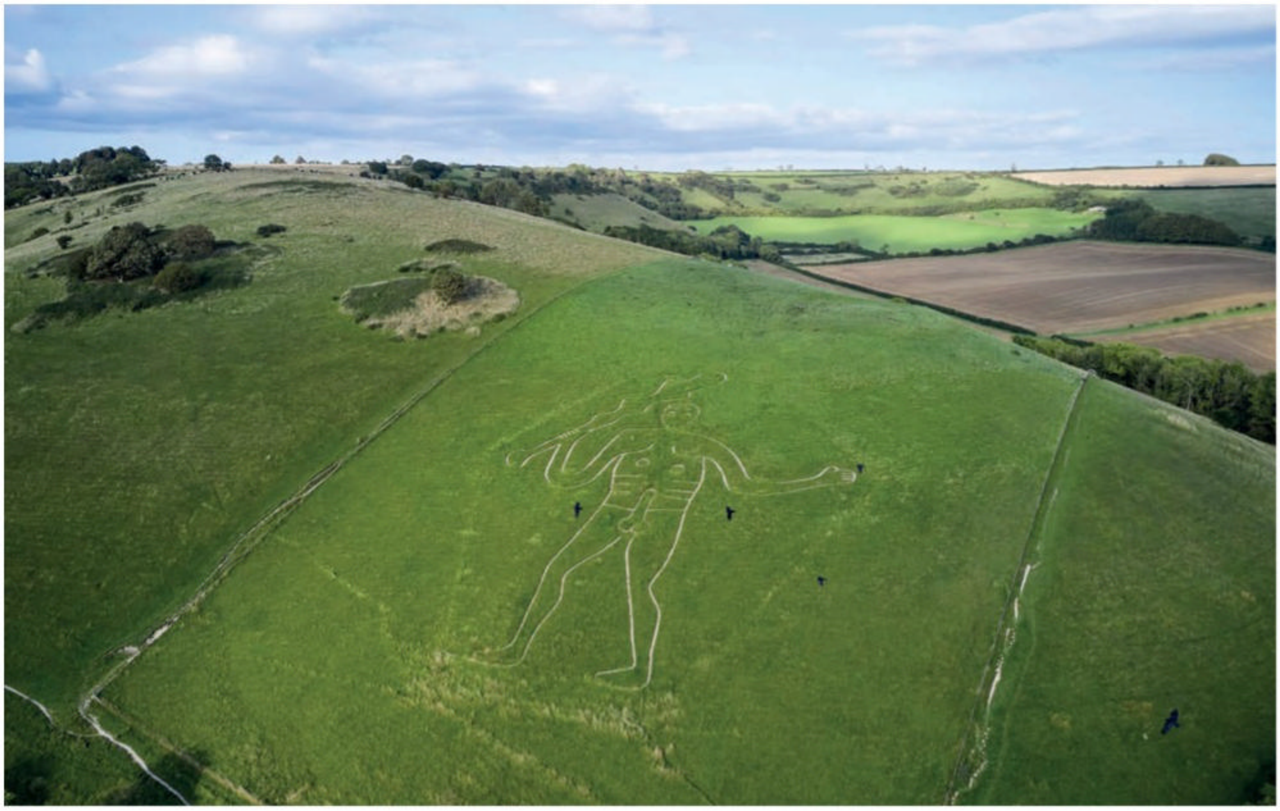


Top to bottom: **Dorset's Cerne Abbas Giant is perhaps the most famous of the UK's downland etchings; methods for carving the bright white lines into the landscape have evolved over the centuries since the custom began**

> The midwinter sun appears to rise over the horse, up its haunches and along its back, giving the impression that the animal is carrying the sun through into spring

representation of the sun horse – a deity thought to aid the sun's passage across the sky – occurring frequently in prehistoric European iconography."

That theory makes sense when you view the horse from afar. The midwinter sun appears to rise over the horse, up its haunches and then along its back, giving the impression that the animal is carrying the sun – the bringer of life that made crops grow – through into another spring.

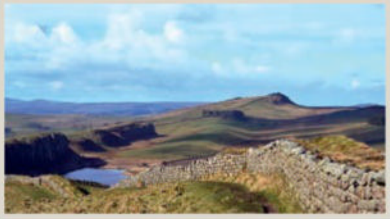
And the horse, as with the Nazca Lines geoglyphs, was certainly designed to be seen from a distance. Its features are difficult to discern close up, yet the white of the chalk crystallises and stands out against the green hillside when seen from further off. The mound of Dragon Hill overlooking the horse has been truncated, no small feat 2,800 years ago, suggesting it was a significant location, probably an observation deck.

"When I guide people around," Foley explains, "I invite them to imagine how it might have been here around 800 BC. This graceful equine figure, some 110 metres long, would have dominated the hillside. As with Stonehenge, there were few manmade landscape features of such stature then. It was probably a place of great ceremony. At celebrations like winter solstice, Dragon Hill might have been the spot from which prominent community members like druids observed the sun's passage across the horse while normal folks watched from the valley below, their torches illuminating the darkness."

Even more recent chalk figures have divided opinion. Many, for example, believe the Westbury White Horse in Wiltshire, re-carved in the 18th century, to have originally been rendered many centuries earlier in commemoration of King Alfred's victory against the Danes at the Battle of Ethandun in 878. Others think a revival of interest in Alfred during the Enlightenment era could have led to the horse being carved. ▶

PHOTOS: © NATIONAL TRUST/JAMES DOBSON/PHIL CROW/ALAMY

PETER SOMMER
TRAVELS



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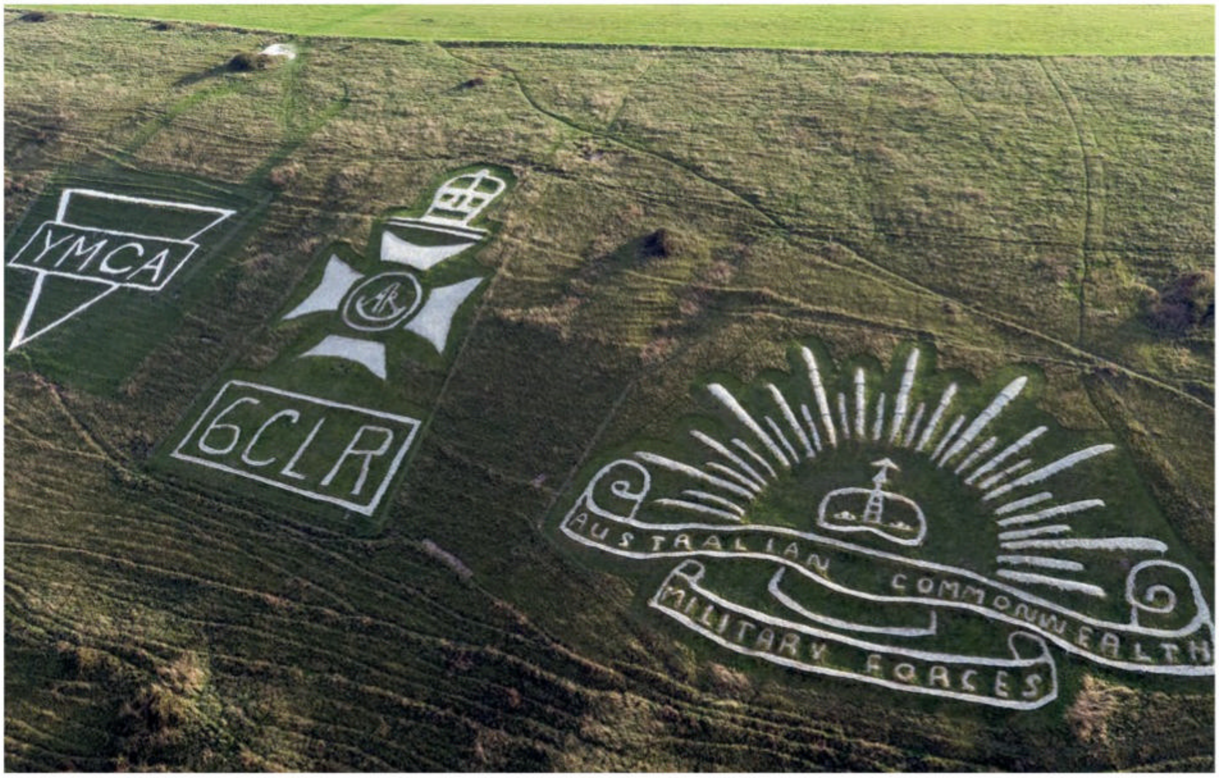
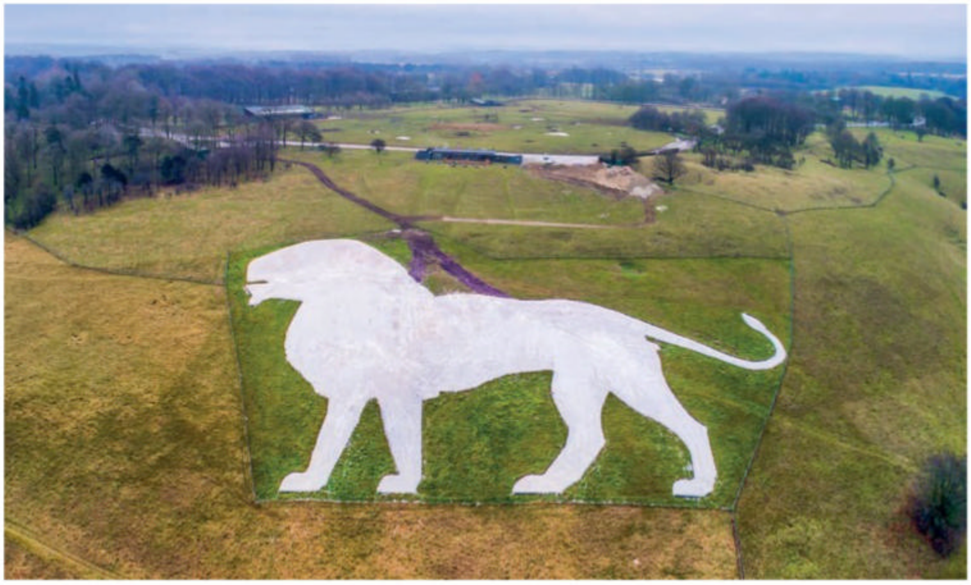


***Top to bottom:* The Fovant Badges in Wiltshire were carved by wartime soldiers waiting to travel to the front line in France; the majestic Whipsnade Lion in Bedfordshire was created to advertise the nearby zoo in 1933**



"Everyone always asks about the gap," says Isobel Geddes, a geologist and Blue Badge Guide who has guided many visitors around Wiltshire's chalk figures. "After the Uffington White Horse, no chalk figures appear to have been created for millennia in Great Britain – and then in the 18th century, a craze for creating them begins again. Of course, many in the interim could have been lost: if not tended, grass covers them quickly. The Hanoverian monarchs also had a white horse on their coat of arms, so carving a white horse could have been a show of loyalty from a landowner."

While chalk figures from more recent centuries seem mostly to be displays of commemoration, several notable examples could have carved to express dissatisfaction or to poke fun. The Osmington White Horse near Weymouth, cut in 1808, depicts George III riding away from Weymouth; the suggestion that he wasn't welcome purportedly so offended the monarch that he never returned there, despite many visits before the figure's creation!

As for the famous Cerne Abbas Giant, a 55 metre-high etching of a bald-headed, well-endowed figure wielding a weapon, sediment analysis undertaken in 2019 suggests he was first etched in the Saxon period (schools of thought are divided between him being a deity from this era or, as a 2024 University of Oxford study concluded, a depiction of Hercules used as a rallying point for Saxon troops). Others, citing the complete lack of reference to the giant before the late 17th century, believe him to be a parody of Oliver Cromwell, while some hold him to be an ancient fertility symbol.

Rather different motivations have been behind the cutting of 20th century chalk figures. Wiltshire's chalky hills have long housed important military garrisons. The Fovant Badges are regimental badges etched into the hillside by troops waiting to go to France in the First World War. In the same period, the cutting of the Bulford Kiwi was a diversion for homesick New Zealand troops awaiting a ship back home; while a map of Australia was carved at the village of Compton Chamberlayne by Canadian and Australian soldiers. The 147-metre-long Whipsnade Lion, meanwhile, was carved in 1933 to advertise nearby Whipsnade Zoo.

The chalk figures may divide opinion, but what everyone can agree on is that the steep faces of southern England's chalk downland have at various times throughout the last 3000 years been used as natural billboards to convey larger-than-life messages. And if we don't always understand quite what those messages were? No matter – it's the element of mystery that casts the spell. ■

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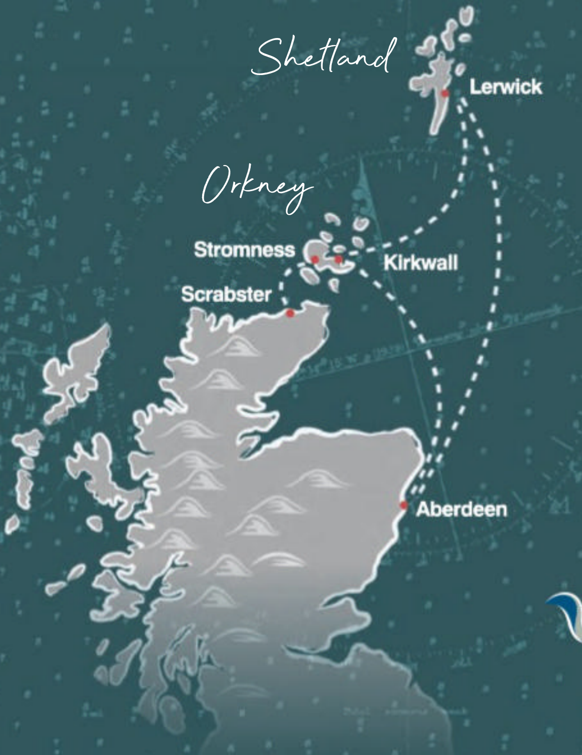
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Above: **Pub signs have evolved from the Roman custom of hanging leaves outside a tavern**

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Whether traditional or quirky, the names of pubs and inns provide intriguing insights into Britain's past, as a new book reveals

WORDS **MARTYN ROUTLEDGE & ELSPETH WILLS**

PHOTOS: © MR STANDFAST/ROBERTO HERRETT/DYLAN GARCIA/LESLEY PARDOE/ALAMY

What would you call your pub if you become the new landlord? Pub names are largely Victorian in origin, although some trace their roots back further through the centuries. Traditionally, landlords could be quite conservative, with a tendency to look back rather than forwards. They often liked to be seen as royalists or to show respect to their local landowner by adopting the symbolism of their family crest.

One example is The White Boar, the personal sign of Richard III until he lost his crown, and his life, to rival Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, thus ending the Wars of the Roses. After this event, publicans changed the name and sign of their pub to any colour except white – a fickle bunch! Landladies have tended to be more radical in their choices: one near the royal country seat of Sandringham recently broke a centuries-old tradition of not naming the hostelry after a living monarch – now a toast to King Charles III.

The name of a pub can often betray its age. Early owners tended to choose a name that reflected their trade – The Barley Mow, The Three Barrels, or The Hop Pole – or their second job, as in The Bricklayers' Arms. Other names are more idiosyncratic. Landlords, or more often their wives, were the source of local jokes, giving rise to names like The Squinting Cat outside Harrogate, where a former landlady was christened 't'owd cat' because of her way of peering from behind the curtains to scrutinise approaching customers. The history of pub names is awash with stories like this.

It was the Romans who first brought the custom of hanging foliage outside a door to indicate that the building was a tavern, which eventually translated into hanging signs. A faint echo of the origin remains in pubs named The Grapes or The Vine. This tradition of hanging greenery outside the door also showed that a brew was ready in the kitchen, giving rise to names like The Holly Bush or The Garland. These names date from the time

▶

of the ale-swilling Saxons and continued throughout most of the Middle Ages. Brewing moved on to become big business from the 17th century, and by the 19th century, brewers extended their grip by buying up pubs and having a direct say in what they were called.

Naming a pub came into its own in the 19th century when most people could read. Some publicans dug out their history books to acknowledge a king, and Alfred the Great, King of the West Saxons from 871–886 AD, is honoured in the towns of his birth and death, as well as the place most associated with him, Alfreton in Derbyshire. Fun-loving kings like Charles II and George IV were popular choices, although Charles' most famous moment came when, as a young man in exile, the future king hid in Penderel's oak tree in 1651, giving rise to Royal Oak pubs the length and breadth of the country.

The King's Head and The King's Arms are also familiar pub names – but which king? Henry VIII was a popular choice as his image was so familiar. Faced with the name The Three Kings, one London pub owner opted for Henry VIII, Elvis and King Kong. Queens, consorts and lovers were also not forgotten. The residents of the Cotswold village of Avening will know with the name of William the Conqueror's wife thanks to a local hostelry, and Nell Gwyn, Charles II's lover, has her own pub in London too.

A blessing from on high could have helped a pub owner's fortunes, with religion being another popular source for names. Names like the Lamb and Flag or the Eagle are references to Christ or one of his disciples. The murder of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral attracted thousands of pilgrims throughout the medieval period, and to cater to them, many pubs en route were transformed into inns, offering food and accommodation as well as ale. While many religious names are obvious, some – like The Bishops Finger – are less so, with this being a reference to the wooden fingerposts pointing the way to Canterbury.

This pattern of naming pubs for tourists was repeated from the 18th century onwards as more people started to travel, leading to names like The Coach and Horses, The Lock Keeper's Arms, and The Railway Tavern. Wonders of Victorian and Edwardian engineering also aided with mammoth ocean liners such as *The Great Eastern* and *The Titanic* both inspiring their own pub names. One unusual name confined to London was The Blue Post, which signified that you could hire a sedan chair from the pub.

Pub names were a way of advertising games and facilities inside and nearby. A pub with 'cock' in its title usually meant that it had a cockpit for the popular sport of cock fighting. Some were more obvious: The Cricketers for the village pub by the cricket ground, or pubs with a hunting reference like The Fox and Hounds where locals met, assembled or drank away the effects of a tiring day in the fields.

In the 21st century, pub names are constantly changing, but it's the simplest ones that remain the most popular – The Red Lion, The Crown, The King's Head and The Swan are prevalent – all of which demonstrate a former landlord's loyalty to the monarchy. And for those who were stuck for an imaginative solution? They could always opt for the plain but effective title: The New Inn.

LAMB & FLAG
FULLER'S
LAMB & FLAG
ROSE STREET WC2
LAMB & FLAG
PERONI
ITALIA

THE ROYAL OAK
THE ROYAL OAK

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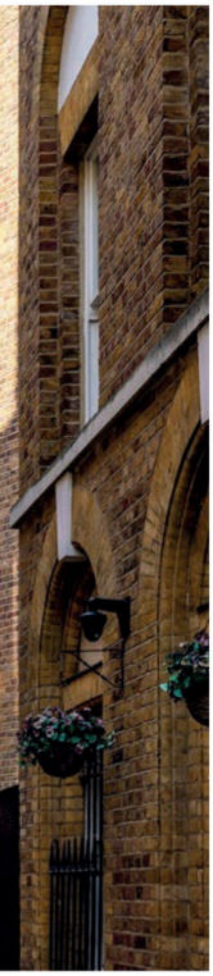


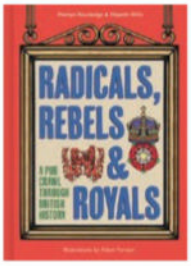
THE BARLEY MOW
PUB BRASSERIE
PUB BRASSERIE

THE CRICKETERS
THE CRICKETERS

Clockwise from far left: **The Lamb and Flag in London's Covent Garden; the Barley Mow in Englefield Green, Surrey; The Cricketers in Richmond; The Royal Oak in Havant, Hampshire**

BUY THE BOOK

This is an edited extract from *Radicals, Rebels & Royals: A Pub Crawl Through British History* by Martin Routledge and Elspeth Wills. This illustrated alternative history book, packed with trivia, tells the fascinating story of Britain through its inns (*harpercollins.co.uk*; £16.99).



RADICALS, REBELS & ROYALS
A PUB CRAWL THROUGH BRITISH HISTORY

PHOTO: © VISITSCOTLAND/AIRBORNE LENS

Take the high road

The celebrated North Coast 500 road trip takes in the ancient sights and spectacular scenery of far northern Scotland

WORDS **EMMA GIBBS**

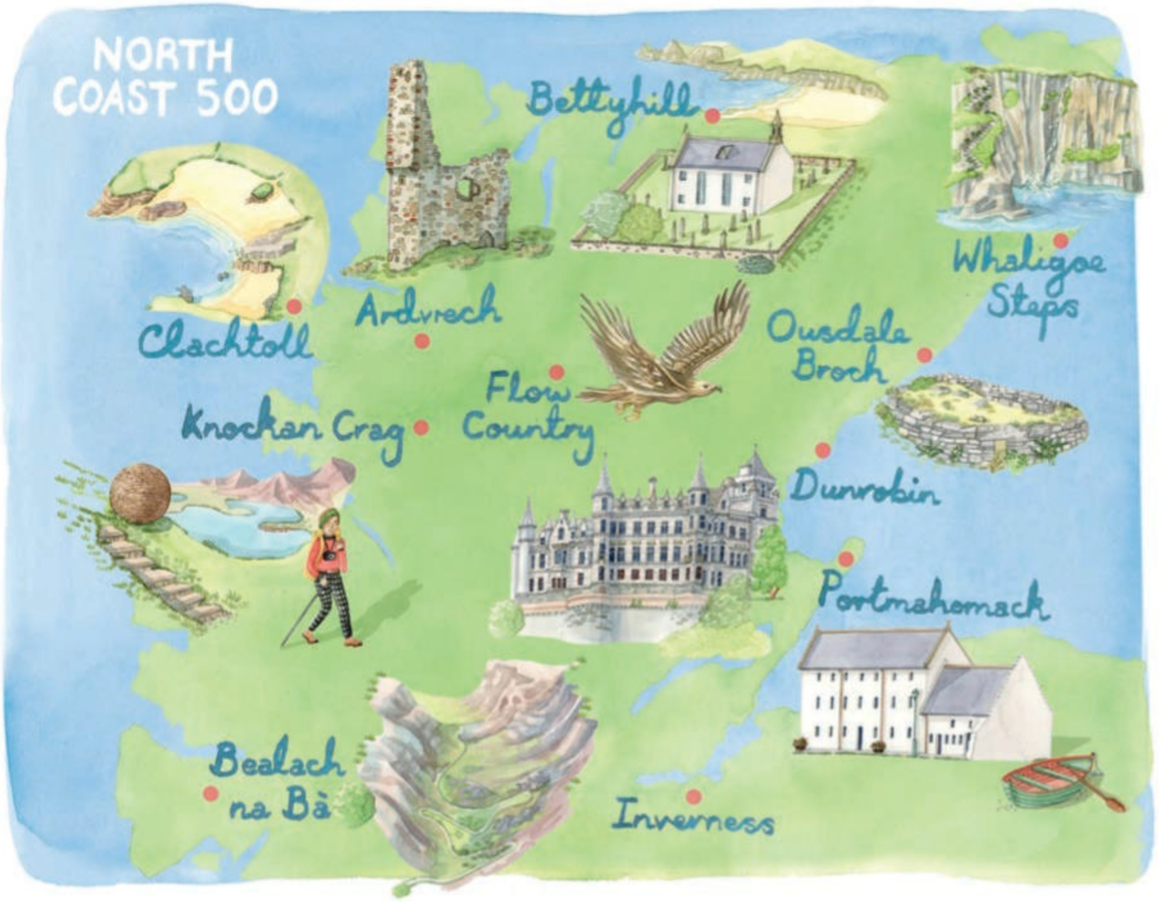


ILLUSTRATION: © MICHAEL A. HILL. PHOTOS: © DUNROBIN CASTLE/RICHARD NEWTON/MARTIN BACHE/ALAMY

Often referred to as Britain's best road trip, the North Coast 500 (NC500) is a 516-mile route around the northernmost reaches of mainland Scotland. This may sound like a relatively short distance for a driving route, but don't be fooled into thinking it's something that should be done in just a couple of days: these are Highland roads, and the going is often slow. This is no hardship though, not least because the views along the way are phenomenal, from the wide skies and steep, dark cliffs of Caithness to the soaring mountains of Assynt, with white-sand beaches, heather-clad moorland and old fishing villages in between.

The route starts and ends in the so-called 'capital of the Highlands', Inverness. The UK's most northerly city, it's overlooked by a 19th century red-sandstone castle, which will reopen this summer after extensive renovations. The hill on which it sits is a great place to get your bearings, with the compact city centre at your feet, and the peak of Ben Wyvis rising in the distance. In the city itself are a number of interesting historical sites, including the graceful, turreted Town House, and little Abertaff House, built in 1593, on Church Street – in the evening, this is where to go for live, traditional music.

The views are phenomenal, with wide skies, soaring mountains, white-sand beaches and heather-clad moorland along the route

From Inverness, the route heads north, where you can choose to follow it east (anti-clockwise) or west (clockwise). The former is my preferred option, and the one I've chosen to follow here, as the drama of the landscape steadily builds up as you drive, though in all honesty there's no 'wrong' way to do the NC500.

Following the route east, you come first to Easter Ross, a relatively low-lying region that has long been used for agriculture, as its patchwork fields suggest – probably at least as far back as the Picts, who lived in northern Scotland between 300 and 900AD.

Little is known about these people, except that they successfully defended their lands against Roman invaders and, in the sixth century, converted to Christianity. You can still see evidence of the latter here today, particularly in the pretty waterfront village of Portmahomack, some 41 miles north-east of Inverness, where the Tarbat Discovery Centre stands on the site of what was once a large Pictish monastery. Inside are more than 200 pieces of Pictish sculpture that were discovered here, including intricately carved fragments of standing stones; a complete version, with its cross still in strikingly clear detail, can be found overlooking Shandwick Bay, nine miles to the south. ▶

Previous page: **The curved Kylesku Bridge crosses the channel connecting Lochs Glencoul and Cairnbawn** *Opposite, clockwise from top:* **With its French-style turrets and formal gardens, Dunrobin Castle is a study in 19th-century elegance; Strathnaver Museum is based in Bettyhill's former parish church of Columba; the Whaligoe Steps zigzag down a Caithness cliffside to a natural harbour**

MUSEUM

Top to bottom: **On the west coast, at Clachtoll Beach rugged terrain gives way to white sands and turquoise waters; surrounded by mountains, Ardvreck Castle's ruins overlook Loch Assynt's waters**

In total contrast is Dunrobin Castle, 28 miles further north, which resembles something out of a French fairytale, with its white turrets and manicured gardens. A castle has stood here since the 13th century, but most of what can be seen today is the result of substantial remodelling in the 19th century. After exploring the extravagant interior, head outside to watch one of the falconry shows, with the birds swooping low over your head and the sea sparkling beyond.

Far pre-dating both Dunrobin's original castle and the Picts are the Iron Age brochs dotted across this region – huge, drystone towers unique to Scotland, they are thought to date back to between 400BC and AD100. Caithness has a particular abundance of them, albeit in varying states of decay. One of the most beautifully preserved examples is Ousdale Broch; you can walk inside and see the different rooms that lead off its circular interior – though at just a fraction of its original height, you'll have to use your imagination to conjure up just how big it would have once been.

PHOTOS: © LIAM ANDERSTREM/VISIT SCOTLAND/STEFANOVALERI/ALAMY

Countless weather-battered villages in Caithness bear testament to the once thriving herring fishing industry here, but no spot is more evocative of this than Whaligoe Steps. Built in the 18th century, the 365 stone steps wind down to a narrow natural harbour and were used by fisherwomen who would haul the day's catch up to the top on their backs before walking it for a further eight miles to the town of Wick.

Inland from here is the vast expanse of Flow Country, designated a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2024. One of the world's most extensive blanket bogs, this peatland is mottled with pools that glitter in the half-light and is home to a surprising diversity of plants; one of the best ways to see it is along the boardwalk trail at Forsinard Flows. Most important of all, however, is the bog's ability to soak up and store carbon from the atmosphere, which will enable it to play a positive role in our changing climate.

Dotted across the region are Iron Age brochs – huge, drystone towers unique to Scotland – which date back as far as 400BC

Wedged between two of the north coast's most beautiful golden-sand beaches – Farr and Torrisdale – is the small village of Bettyhill, named after Elizabeth, Duchess of Sutherland (who, in the early 19th century, resided at Dunrobin). The duchess and her husband, the 1st Duke of Sutherland, were responsible for the forced eviction of thousands of their tenants to make way for large-scale sheep farming – tenants that did not move south or emigrate were often resettled in new fishing villages like this one. You can learn more about this brutal history, the scars of which are still evident in abandoned settlements nearby, at the Strathnaver Museum on the outskirts of the village.

After Bettyhill, the scenery ramps up, with mountains soon crowding into every view and the road climbing up and down around them. Along the west coast, bulbous rocks guard patches of startling white sand. One of the best is at Clachtoll, a small but perfectly formed swathe; walk north along the headland to find the ruins of a broch that was home to a family some 2,000 years ago, before it was destroyed in a fire. Meanwhile, 15 miles east is another set of atmospheric ruins: Ardvreck Castle, which stands on a promontory on Loch Assynt, mountains looming on all sides.

There's no better place to understand the geological history that surrounds you along this part of the route than at Knockan Crag National Nature Reserve. ▶

> The Bealach na Bà twists its way up and over the coastal village of Applecross – a thrilling journey of hairpin turns and expansive views

Here, the layers of rock tell the story of how the planet has changed over millennia, and you can lay your hands on some of the oldest rocks on earth while feeling very small in the shadow of the surrounding peaks.

Continuing south, the road follows the coast for much of the way, the interior largely inaccessible apart from on foot. Every corner seems to offer up a better view of mountains and moorland than the last – keep your eyes peeled too for wild goats, red deer and white-tailed sea eagles.

For many drivers, the highlight of the whole route is the Bealach na Bà, which twists its way up and over the mountains east of the picturesque coastal village of Applecross. It's a thrilling, single-lane journey of hairpin turns and – assuming the weather is in your favour – expansive views, if not one for nervous or inexperienced drivers (or large vehicles). A road has been here since 1822, but the route over the mountains was long used by cattle drovers before that – its Gaelic name means 'Pass of the Cattle'.

Thankfully, the pretty village of Lochcarron awaits on the other side of the pass, with cafés and restaurants to help steady any frayed nerves; don't miss the chance to visit the nearby Lochcarron Weavers Heritage Shop, where you can marvel at the hundreds of varieties of tartan on sale – and perhaps even find your own.

From here, it's a straightforward journey inland back to Inverness. Chances are, however, that you'll spend it planning your return – no matter how much time you allow for taking in the North Coast 500, it never seems to be long enough.

Right: Hen harriers are just one of the species of bird you might spot on your NC500 trail
Below: Knockan Crag National Nature Reserve is part of the North West Highlands Geopark

THE PLANNER

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The best way to start your trip is on the Caledonian Sleeper train from London Euston, which arrives in the centre of Inverness in the morning. Daytime trains also run from London, York, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Alternatively, the city's small airport is mainly served by domestic flights. You can hire a car from both the station and the airport.
sleeper.scot; hial.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY

In Inverness, the Glen Mhor has appealing rooms in attractive 19th-century buildings along the River Ness; don't miss a visit to the on-site distillery. Highland Coast Hotels has a number of lovely properties along the North Coast 500, including in the beachside village of Brora (where the manager frequently plays his bagpipes over breakfast) and in Kylesku, which has a superlative lochside position.
glen-mhor.com; highlandcoasthotels.com

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

You'll need to plan ahead once you're on the road, particularly out of season, when hotel restaurants are often among the only places still open. One exception is the Store Café in Bettyhill, which is open every day of the year. As well as sweat treats, it serves meals from breakfasts and sandwiches to seafood platters and curries. Don't miss trying the famous pies at Lochinver Larder on the west coast – as well as savoury options (from venison to butternut squash), there's a selection of delicious deep-filled sweet offerings.
storecafe.co.uk; lochinverlarder.com.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See *northcoast500.com* for more information for things to see and do along the route.

Emma Gibbs is the author of *Scotland's North Highlands,* published in February 2025 (*bradtguides.com*).

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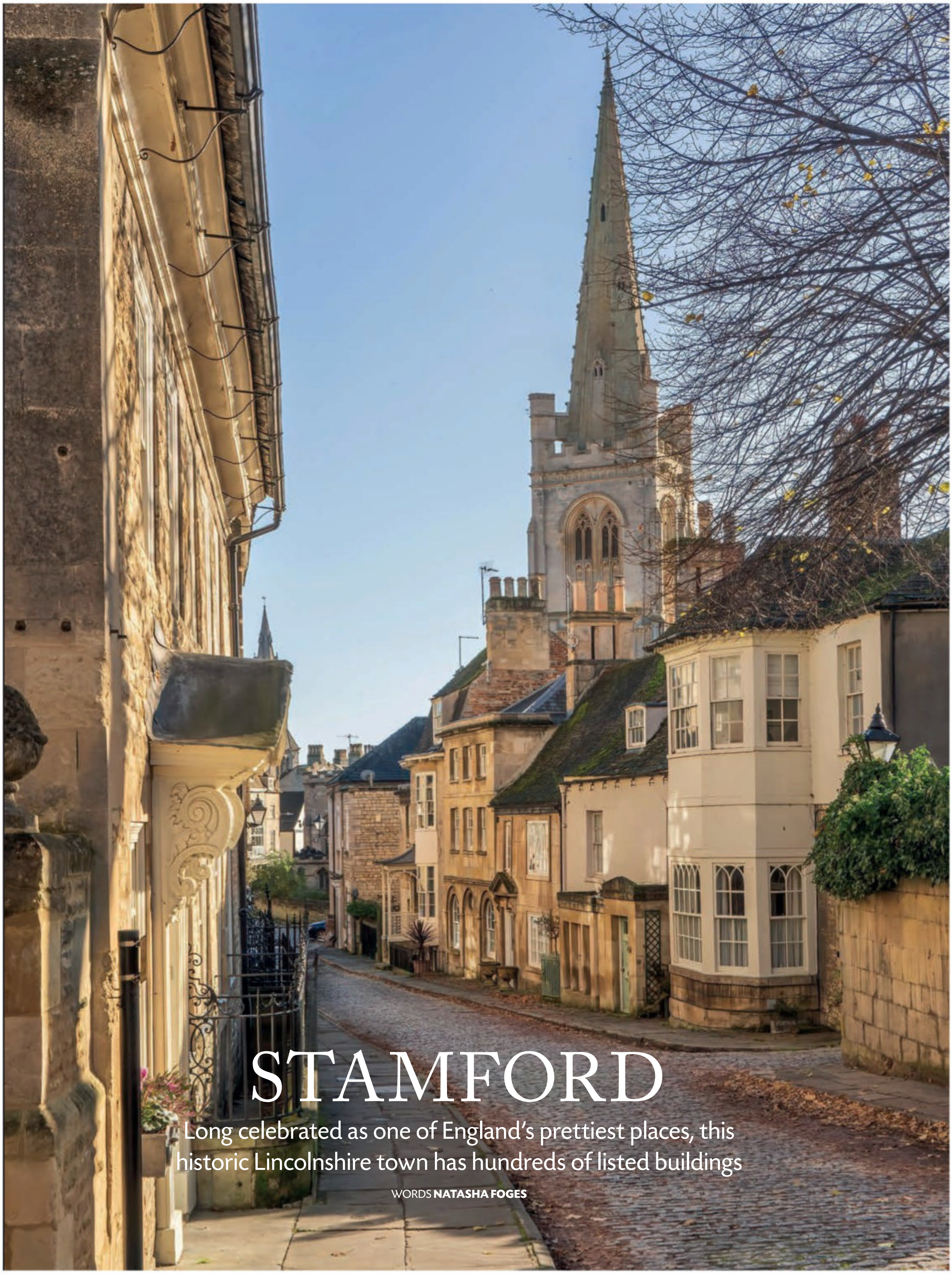


STAMFORD

Long celebrated as one of England's prettiest places, this historic Lincolnshire town has hundreds of listed buildings

WORDS **NATASHA FOGES**

PHOTOS: © GORDON BELL/ALAMY/MATT MUSGRAVE

“If there is a more beautiful town in the whole of England I have yet to see it,” wrote the historian W.G. Hoskins of Stamford. Writers through the ages have waxed lyrical about the Lincolnshire town’s charms, and for location scouts on the hunt for the quintessential English market town for a costume drama, it’s the first port of call. Within moments of arriving, you’ll see why: ‘England’s finest stone town’, as it’s often called, is a captivating pocket of cobbled medieval streets and elegant Georgian townhouses that invites aimless wandering (with frequent stops for all the photo opportunities).

Stamford’s history dates back more than 1,000 years, but the core of town is unmistakeably Georgian (hence its starring role in period dramas from *Middlemarch* to *Pride and Prejudice*). The town became prosperous thanks to the local wool and cloth industries, and remains virtually unchanged since its 18th century heyday. Since a 1967 law made it England’s first designated conservation area, it has more than 600 listed buildings made of mellow limestone, and 12 ancient monuments.

Stroll the winding streets and alleys, lined with carved stone facades, to High Street St Martin, whose grand Georgian buildings house independent shops and cafes. Over the ancient bridge that crosses the River Welland is the imposing Town Hall, where the Stamford Museum is being established. When the museum opens, it will display a host of treasures dating back to the Roman settlement that once stood here, including Roman coins and pottery; in the meantime, there are free guided tours on Fridays.

Wander north to discover cobbled Barn Hill, one of Stamford’s most photographed streets (in a town not lacking in photo opportunities). If you’re in town on a Friday or Saturday, stroll down to the lively town market, which has been going strong since medieval times and sells local produce (until the 1830s, you could even buy a wife!).

Among Stamford’s dazzling array of fine buildings, the jewel in the crown is 13th-century St Mary’s Church. The novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott reportedly doffed his hat to the view up to St. Mary’s, claiming it was the finest sight on the road between London and Edinburgh. And it still inspires awe: a magnificent example of Gothic architecture, it has stained-glass windows, painted ceilings and stone carvings galore. Prominently placed between the two altars is the ornately decorated tomb of Sir David Philips and his wife. Philips fought with Henry Tudor (who would soon become Henry VII) at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. Henry Tudor’s mother was Margaret Beaufort, who lived at Collyweston, just outside Stamford, and Sir David acted as her steward, as well as being Keeper of the King’s Swans.

Another one of Stamford’s four parish churches, St Martin’s, is home to another resplendent marble tomb – that of the 5th Earl of Exeter, who once lived at Burghley House and was known as the ‘Travelling Earl’ for his penchant for popping to Italy to buy paintings and furniture for his home, Burghley House.

Burghley, on the edge of town, is an essential stop. It is one of the finest stately homes in England, built in the late 16th century for Sir William Cecil, Elizabeth I’s chief advisor and right-hand man. From the Tudor kitchen with its soaring ceiling and gleaming copper pans to the upstairs state rooms with their carved four-posters and priceless paintings, Burghley is full of treasures. The house is set within 3,000 acres of parkland, with formal gardens that include manicured lawns, contemporary sculptures and delightful water features.

Before leaving town, stop by tranquil Stamford Meadows by the River Welland, where the Romans first set up camp. This being Stamford, even in this quiet place there’s history all around, from the remains of a castle built by William the Conqueror to the distant echo of thundering hooves: Stamford was once notorious for the sport of bull-running, a riotous event held on the Meadows for 600 years until 1839. Just another fascinating footnote in Stamford’s many-layered history.

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

Regular trains run to Stamford (via Peterborough) from London King’s Cross, taking 1hr 30min. *thetrainline.com*

WHERE TO STAY

The best place to stay is the William Cecil, a beautifully restored hotel whose spacious, handsomely decorated rooms are individually designed in heritage tones. Statement beds and luxurious linens make staying here a treat, and there’s an excellent restaurant too. *thewilliamcecil.co.uk*

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Milly’s, the restaurant at the William Cecil, serves delicious dishes made from local produce, including hearty pies and steaks, as well as an excellent Sunday roast. The Bull & Swan has a wonderfully atmospheric interior, with flagstones and wood beams, and a menu of elevated pub classics. A good place for a drink is the venerable George Inn, little changed from its 17th century heyday, when it was the busiest coaching inn on the Great North Road between London and York. Choose between two cosy bars: the London Bar and the York Bar, which used to be the old waiting rooms for passengers on the London- and York-bound coaches. *thewilliamcecil.co.uk; thebullandswan.co.uk; georgehotelofstamford.com*

FURTHER INFORMATION

visitlincolnshire.com

See our new website **discoverbritain.com** for more day-trip ideas

***Opposite:* A view down the attractively cobbled Barn Hill, a popular period-drama location *Above:* Set amid 3,000 verdant acres, 16th-century Burghley House boasts an array of precious antiques and fine art**

ESTATE OF LUXURY

Magnificence and extravagance isn't a thing of the past – these historic homes open their doors to overnight guests

WORDS **JENNY ROWE-PATEL**

PHOTO © WOLTERTON

Walcot Hall, Shropshire

While the original Walcot Hall dates back to Tudor times, its Georgian facade was designed in 1764 by Sir William Chambers for Lord Clive of India. Today, three two-to-four-bedroom apartments on the second floor welcome guests into the fold. These rooms make up what would have been the old servants' quarters, but today they offer spacious living and kitchen areas – think cosy and quirky rather than stately. The Berkeley Apartment in the West Wing is also available for hire and comes with entrancing views over the lake and Shropshire Hills beyond.

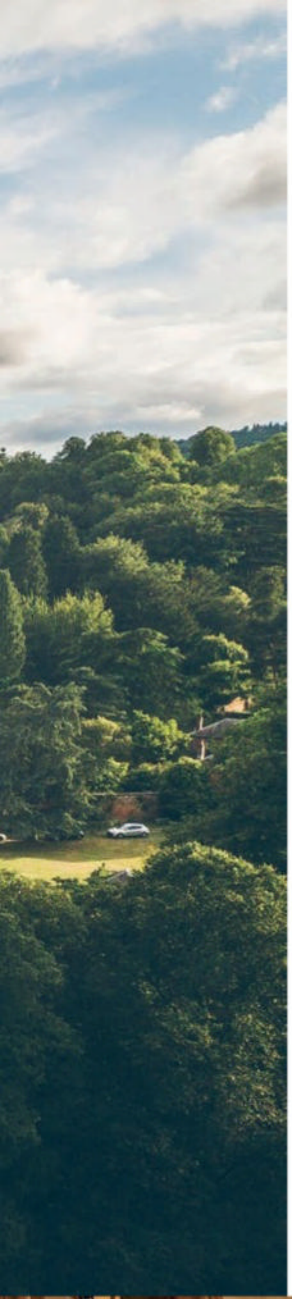
Outside of the main house, a romantic but more rustic self-catering option is Wheelwright's Shop, previously a wagon-wheel repair hub, or you could stay in The Chapel, nestled amid the English oak and chestnut trees of Walcot's 30-acre arboretum. A peaceful night's sleep in one of its two mezzanine bedrooms will set you up for a day's walking in the equally unspoilt hills. *walcothall.com*

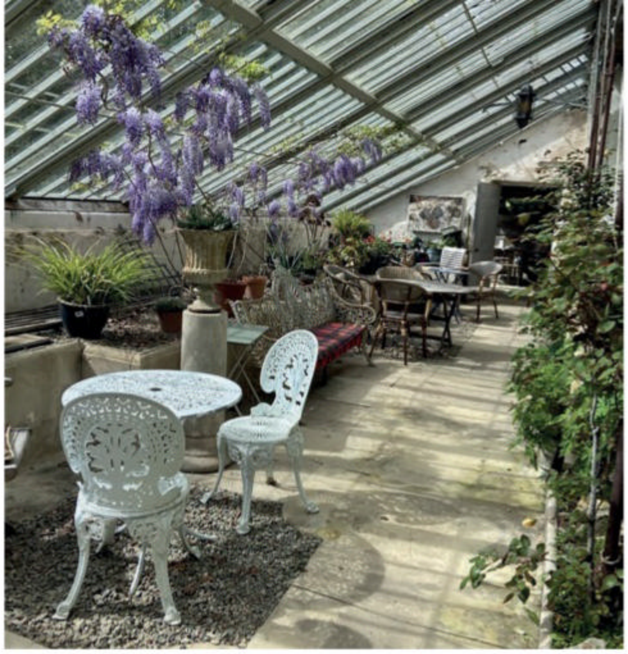
Broughton Hall, Yorkshire

The UK's only accredited Healing Hotel, Broughton Sanctuary has harnessed the magic of its history and extravagance in the pursuit of wellness. The 3,000-acre estate was first established in 1097 – a gift from William the Conqueror – and has been run by the Tempest family for 900 years. Nowadays, its natural bounty is put to good use, offering a very 21st century array of outdoor activities such as wild swimming, a woodland sauna, ice bathing and woodland dining, among other pursuits.

Choose between 19 holiday lodges and cottages, or take over the main hall for the night – or week! Its palatial state rooms and 17 bedrooms won't disappoint. The on-site walled garden bistro, Utopia, serves plant-based breakfasts and lunches for those in self-catering properties – if you're lucky enough to stay in the hall, you'll have your own in-house chefs for that. *broughtonsanctuary.co.uk*

PHOTOS: © LIAM CRAWLEY/SIMON JAUNCEY 2016/ACTON SCOTT HALL/CHRIS TAYLOR/VIEW WEST PHOTOGRAPHY





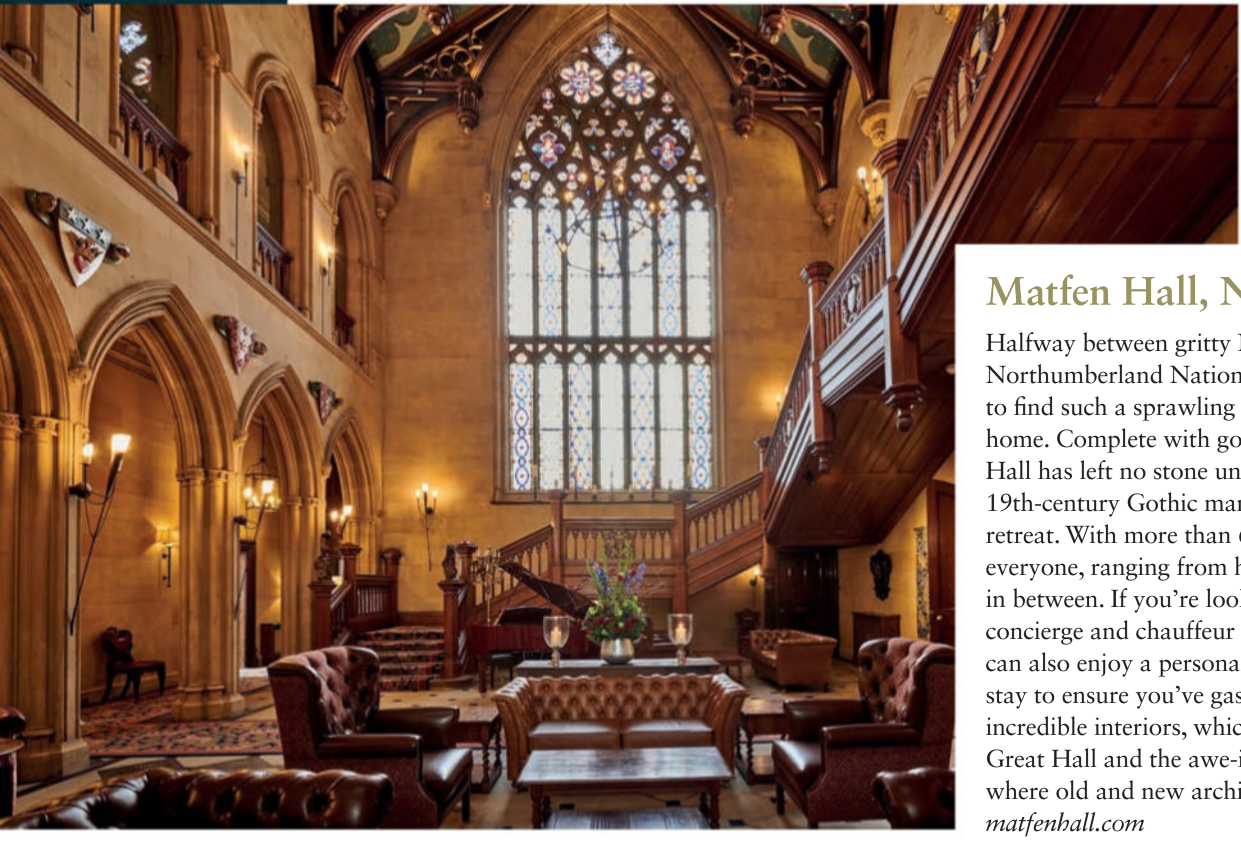
Acton Scott Hall, Shropshire

Run as a B&B by husband-and-wife team Alison and Francis Acton – whose family have owned the house since the 16th century – Acton Scott Hall is a handsome Elizabethan mansion built in 1580. Overnight invitations are extended to those attending house tours, weddings, events, or by private arrangement. The four rooms overlook either the pristine lawns and gardens – with Wenlock Edge beyond – or Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, which along with other areas on the estate, was featured in the popular BBC series, *Victorian Farm*.

The rooms retain original features, such as a Jacobean frieze and decorative oak panelling in the aptly named Oak Room. Tuck into breakfast in the Drawing Room before exploring the beautiful Shropshire Hills. Characterful historic market towns including Ludlow, Shrewsbury and Bishop's Castle are all within easy reach. *actonscott.com/hall*

Wolterton, Norfolk

Landscape architect Charles Bridgeman's genius give this Norfolk sanctuary a serenity you can't fail to feel as you approach the Palladian mansion along its grand tree-lined drive. Commissioned by Horatio Walpole, younger brother to British Prime Minister at the time, Sir Robert Walpole, Wolterton's opulence can in part be put down to an ancient power: sibling rivalry. There are 500 rolling acres to explore: discover craftily concealed vistas, secret statues, a sweeping lake and a lovingly restored walled garden. Incredibly, all this could be yours – for a short time only – if you fancy renting the whole place. But there are some slightly more humble yet no less refined options, such as the Georgian Gate House, which sleeps five with views over Wolterton's meadows. All on-site holiday retreats include a tour of the main house when you stay – the best of both worlds. *wolterton.co.uk*



Matfen Hall, Northumberland

Halfway between gritty Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the wild Northumberland National Park, you might be surprised to find such a sprawling and perfectly polished heritage home. Complete with golf course, spa and helipad, Matfen Hall has left no stone unturned in its transformation from 19th-century Gothic mansion to ultra-luxurious modern retreat. With more than 60 bedrooms, there's a style for everyone, ranging from homely to stately and everything in between. If you're looking for the latter, consider its concierge and chauffeur services, because why not? You can also enjoy a personal tour of the estate during your stay to ensure you've gasped at every inch of the hall's incredible interiors, which include the stained glass-lit Great Hall and the awe-inspiring Cloisters Restaurant, where old and new architectural styles are tastefully fused. ▶ *matfenhall.com*

Long Crendon Manor, Buckinghamshire

Perched on the edge of quiet Long Crendon village and looking out over lush Buckinghamshire fields and the Chiltern Hills in the distance, you'll be hard pushed to find a more exclusive place to stay than Long Crendon Manor. This huge estate has just three rooms – but what they lack in number, they more than make up for in style, size and historic sparkle. Guests won't be surprised to know that the manor gets a mention in the Domesday Book – another handout from William the Conqueror, it was awarded to his right-hand man, Sir Walter Giffard, after victory at the Battle of Hastings.

Two of the rooms are named after one-time owner Laline Hohler, who began the restoration of the house in 1920, and her mother, Lady De L'Isle. Think exposed beams, elegant chandeliers and antique furnishings at every turn. If guests can tear themselves away from their boudoirs, they can sink into leather armchairs in the oak-panelled drawing room, or lose themselves in the maze in the grounds. *longcrendonmanor.co.uk*

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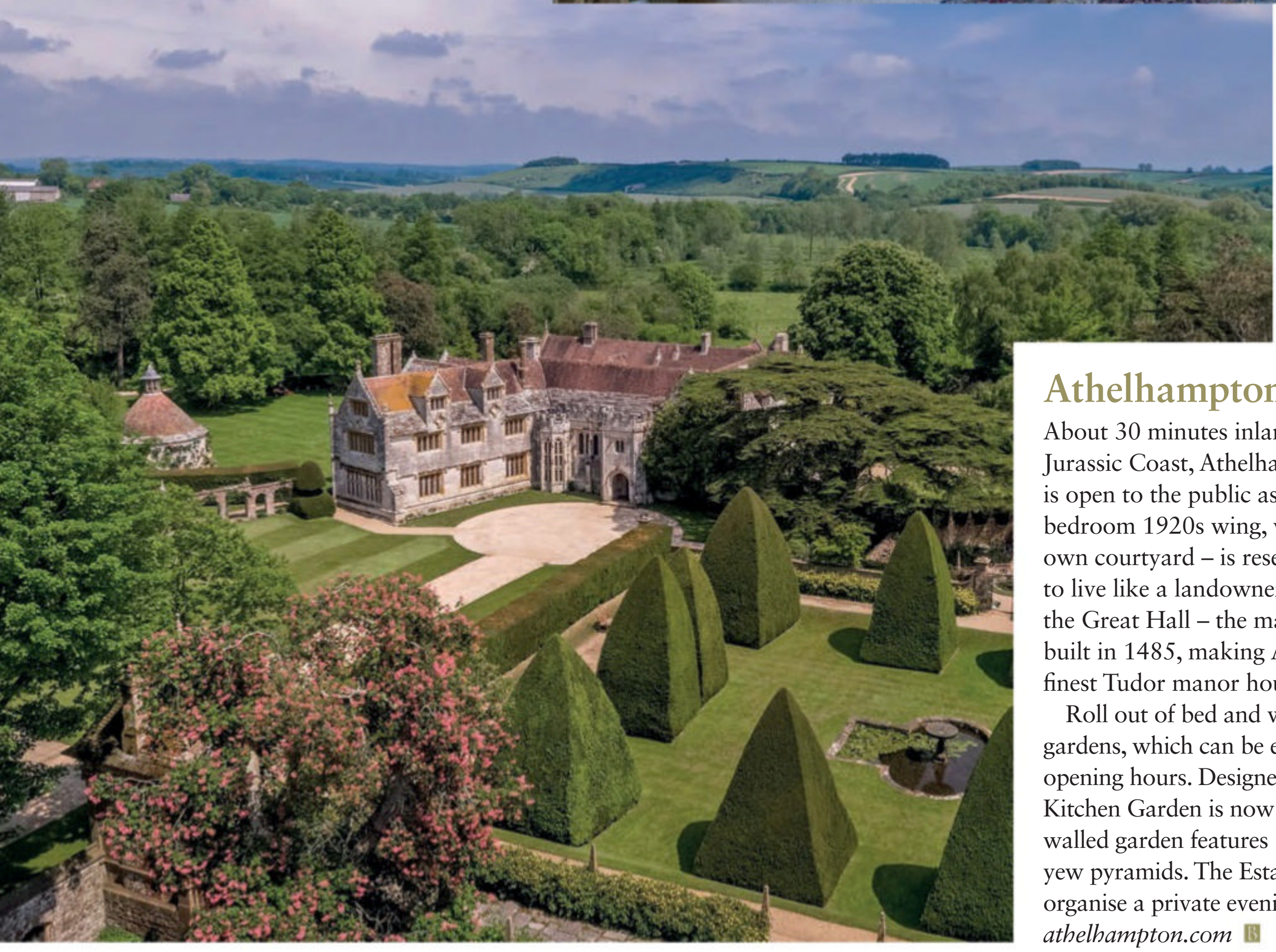

Athelhampton, Dorset

About 30 minutes inland from the stunning Jurassic Coast, Athelhampton House & Gardens is open to the public aside from one large, four-bedroom 1920s wing, which – complete with its own courtyard – is reserved for guests who want to live like a landowner for the week. Meanwhile the Great Hall – the main part of the house – was built in 1485, making Athelhampton one of the finest Tudor manor houses in Britain.

Roll out of bed and wander the Grade I-listed gardens, which can be enjoyed exclusively outside opening hours. Designed by Inigo Thomas, the Kitchen Garden is now fully restored, while the walled garden features 12 world-famous topiary yew pyramids. The Estate Manager can also organise a private evening house tour upon request. *athelhampton.com*

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A day with...

QUINTIN LAKE

Photographer

The award-winning photographer spent 454 days over five years walking the British coastline to produce *The Perimeter,* a book blending more than 1,000 images with an accompanying travelogue

When did you discover a love of walking?

When I was ten my mother decided we would spend the summer holidays walking the 480 kilometres from John o' Groats to Glasgow. It felt so natural and thrilling, walking every day, being immersed in nature. Now 40 year later, I still feel that walking opens the heart and mind. Walking through different weathers you get moments of beauty or revelation, and photography is how I express the connection I feel to the landscape.

You've visited more than 70 countries. Is Britain still special?

I think so! Maybe it's the varied geology affecting land use and, in turn, the types of people who settle in one region, but, in my experience, there are more stories and concentrated history here than anywhere else. You can walk through more visible histories in a day; through Norman to Neolithic to the second world war to the contemporary.

Did you always want to be a photographer?

I trained as an architect and learned photography, which I used as a kind of notebook to record design ideas, and, as the years passed, I became more interested in the resulting image as art than in the information it contained. I felt I was better at it, and it suits my personality to focus intently on the world as it is, rather than to try to redesign it.

You spend days without seeing another soul. Don't you get lonely?

It was only around 1800 that the modern conception of 'loneliness' took root. Before that, people talked about 'oneliness', because if you were alone you were connected to the universe. I certainly feel that. When I'm alone, I feel more connected to nature. When I'm walking by myself, I'm not on holiday. Every minute, I'm looking for an image and actively thinking, whereas if I'm walking with friends and family, I'm talking to them, we're laughing, so I can't concentrate on looking for an image. Sure, if I've been by myself for a week and I walk past a warm pub and hear laughter, I have a yearning for human contact, but that's a bit different from loneliness.

What adventures have you had since your coastal odyssey?

I'm just back from a very snowy Great Glen Way, which means I've finished backpacking all 19 national trails. This year I plan to finish camping on the 442 mountain summits of England and Wales – only 137 to go! I'm away with my tent and camera for probably about two or three months of the year, then I come back to be a father and husband.

Your wife must be very tolerant!

I think that's the right word for it. But Mila [the Czech artist Mila Fürstová] understands that I find inspiration in the external world, and I can't create my work without inspiration. When she has work commitments, I take care of domestic things, so we are a team.

Are you discouraged by the discomfort and risk of injury?

Well, it is a big strain on the body, though I now manage my fitness better than I did when I was younger, as I eat better and combine daily strength and endurance training. A torn tendon and a stress fracture were the worst, as I needed to stop for many weeks to recover. *The Perimeter* was a journey of two halves. Scotland was much tougher, carrying more than 20kg in rough terrain, harsh weather and often with no coastal paths. I'd get stuck, the way blocked, and have to backtrack.

> "Walking through different weathers you get moments of beauty or revelation"

Your scariest moment?

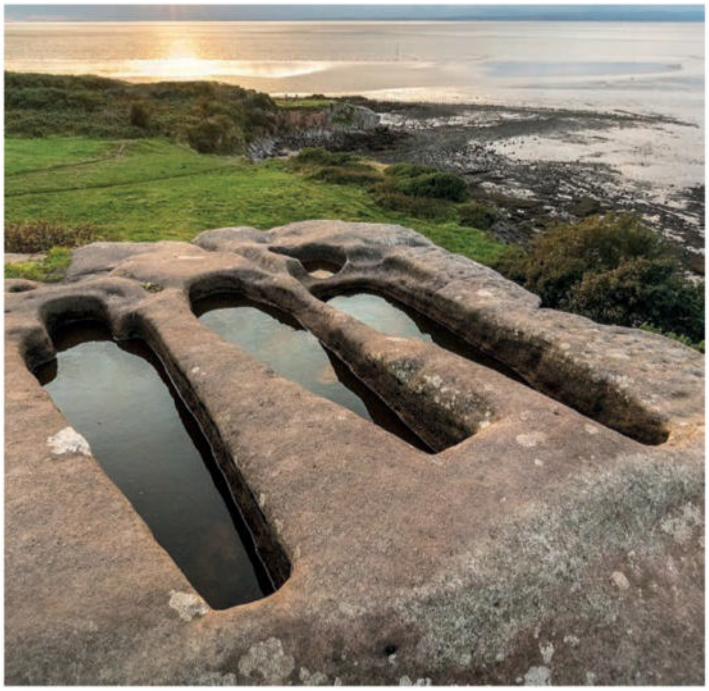
Trying to find a way up cliffs the consistency of lumpy custard at Holderness in East Yorkshire in the dark, with the sea lapping at my boots, finding none of the steps or ramps shown on the maps, because it turns out those cliffs erode by seven metres a year, and the maps were out of date.

And moments of joy?

It was thrilling to cross the Severn Bridge to Wales with a feeling of weightlessness and, ahead of me, a whole new country I didn't know much about. Then crossing the Forth Bridge, this beautiful structure, on the way to Edinburgh. In Knoydart, the two otters that emerged from Loch Nevis in the golden light before sunset and walked past me. And in Morvern the sight of a rare sea eagle flying overhead with a fish in its talons. B

The Perimeter: a Photographic Journey around the Coast of Britain is published by Hutchinson Heinemann and is out on 15 May. penguin.co.uk

PHOTOS: © QUINTIN LAKE, 2025/BRAIN-2020

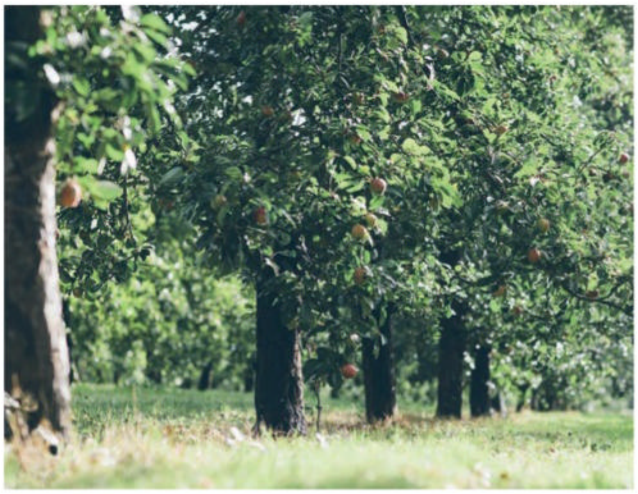


West Country Cider

FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

In the last of our food and drink series, our columnist samples a traditional English tipple

WORDS **SANDRA LAWRENCE**



"For the true taste of the West Country, nothing beats cider"

Some people may tell you that beer is the ultimate English alcoholic drink. Don't believe a word of it. Hopped beer is an import – an upstart – from as recently as 1400. There is an argument for good old-fashioned unhopped 'ale' as the quintessential English beverage, but for the true taste of the West Country – and historically, further north to Herefordshire and beyond, including Yorkshire – nothing beats cider.

Apples have grown in the British Isles for thousands of years. Even the mythical Avalon, which some claim as Glastonbury, Somerset, is sometimes called 'the Isle of Apples'. Cider was the backbone of the rural economy, the ultimate draw for a workforce. A labourer might receive four to six pints a day; the ration doubled at harvest time.

You can make cider from any apples, but the taste will vary dramatically. Specific cider varieties have an intense, tart flavour, making them terrible for eating but perfect for what they call 'scrumpy' way down West.

In a great irony, while cider is enjoying a renaissance there are few truly traditional cider farms left, but some remain. Sheppy's Cider Farm, near Taunton, Somerset, established in 1917, is enjoying its sixth generation. David Sheppy's grandfather Stanley arrived with cattle but decided to revitalise the ancient orchards and recommence cider-making. He planted more trees in 1932, named for his newborn son, David's father, and 'Richard's Orchards' are still growing strong. More have been added by David and his wife Louisa.

The trees vary in size. You can plant more per acre in bush form, but old-fashioned, sky-scraping standards allow for cattle grazing below, keeping the whole process organic. These are very happy animals – after processing the juice for cider, David gives the pomace (pulpy residue) to his longhorns, who gambol across the field, racing each other to be first to the trough.

People have been visiting the farm since the 1960s when Richard started a tiny roadside shop on the A38 motorway, then the only route between Yorkshire and the West Country. It was particularly popular with lorry drivers. His shed morphed into a small teashop, then the family turned an old apple bay into a restaurant. While visitors aren't the family's main business – Sheppys are first and foremost cider makers – they are always welcome. Some come to view oceans of exquisite blossom in springtime, some to see leafy orchards in their full summer glory – but most want to see the apples themselves. There are many varieties, so the season is long.

Cider aficionados can taste the versions that have been matured in oak barrels, but it has always been sold in a number of different vessels, including bottles, jugs and kegs. Traditionally, every company has its own colours – Sheppy's is red, green and brown – though today kegs also have labels, as the drivers collecting them can usually now read. Progress!

The one thing that hasn't changed is the taste. Nothing beats a truly well-made West Country cider.

PHOTOS: © SHEPPY'S CIDER FARM

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